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CENTRE FOR THE ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Parents Returning to Work:
Evaluation of Grant Recipient Outcomes 2004-05, 2005-06

Report to the Learner Access Branch,
Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development,
Victoria

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Acronyms

ACE`	Adult and Community Education
AMES	Adult Multicultural Education Services
DIIRD	Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development
DVC	Department for Victorian Communities
LGA	Local Government Area
PRTW	Parents Returning to Work
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

Executive Summary

The *Parents Returning to Work Program* (PRTW) is a Victorian government initiative which commenced in 2003. It provides grants to assist eligible parents who wish to return to paid employment after a period of caring for children to participate in training that will increase their work skills and job prospects.

Up to \$1000 per person is available and these funds can be used to meet course fees and other training-related costs for study materials and childcare.

This evaluation aimed to review the achievements of the program and to identify whether it provided value for the money invested in it by the Victorian government. It also aimed to contribute to the improvement of the program.

The evaluation has comprised three major activities:

1. Data provided by the program administrator (Adult Multicultural Education Services) and obtained from other sources (census, ABS, Victorian government) was analysed to provide background information about grant recipients, the regional distribution of grants and how recipients use grant funds.
2. Consultations were conducted with ten of the 377 providers registered under the program, selected to represent different types of providers (TAFE, ACE, RTO) in different locations (metropolitan/regional). The consultations aimed to identify any barriers or impediments providers might have encountered in processing applications and dealing with applicants and any difficulties or problems in their dealings with the program administrator, together with possible solutions or other improvements.
3. A telephone survey was conducted of over 280 grant recipients selected at random from a list provided by the program administrator. The survey aimed to provide further background information about grant recipients, the courses they take and to identify employment or other outcomes of their study. Respondents were also given the opportunity to comment on the program and possible improvements.

Consultations were also held with the program administrator and with staff of the Learner Access Branch of DIIRD.

Is the program meeting its objectives?

The data collected for this evaluation indicates that the program has been highly successful in achieving this objective of assisting parents to prepare to return to work after being at home caring for their children.

Since the program began, over 8000 parents have been assisted. Based on data from the survey of grant recipients:

- 88% complete at least one course, with about half going on to a second course and a quarter to a third course, with an even greater rate of success.
- 71% obtain employment after completing their last course, two-thirds of them within three months.

- 82% of those who gain employment do so in an area of work directly or indirectly related to the course/s they complete.

The grant positively influences the decision of parents to enrol in study, assisting many to study who would otherwise not have been able. According to the survey data:

- Nearly 48% of grant recipients would not have enrolled in their first course but for the grant and this proportion rises to 61% for a second and 70% for a third course.
- The proportion of single parents among grant recipients (24%) is considerably higher than among the general population (20% in Victoria).
- At the time they received the grant, the majority of grant recipients lived in a household with a pre-tax income below average weekly earnings for adults, 30% in a household with an annual incomes of less than \$20,000.

Areas for improvement

The current allocation system results in a skewed distribution which advantages some regions and recipients at the expense of others. The distribution of grants appears weakly linked to measures of need. Several LGAs which rank low on the SEIFA index have received high levels of grants but others have received very few. And while there are some small LGAs that receive a relatively high number of grants, overall smaller regional LGAs do not fare well in the allocation.

Recommendation 1

To more closely align the grant with measures of need some criteria on need should be included in the allocation process. It may be that say 70% of grants could be allocated on the current basis. The remaining 30% of grants could be allocated to LGAs or to clusters of LGAs according to demographic features of the LGAs and the value of the SEIFA Index of disadvantage.

The current process for allocating PRTW grants also does not take into account where skills shortages are—nor the types of skills required in these areas. It would be possible to give greater weight to skills shortages in the grant allocation process, but it is doubtful that the benefits would be sufficient to justify the additional work involved. The work would be complex and most recipients already secure employment. Comments for the survey also indicate a preference among grant recipients for ‘family-friendly’ work, which may not be in industries or occupations where shortages exist. Skill shortage information is best provided to job seekers by skilled careers advisers and used to assist in their job and training choices.

Is the program being marketed effectively?

Demand for PRTW grants continually exceeds supply. Consequently there has been no need for extensive marketing of the program.

Consultations with providers indicate that a small number, especially those which have developed courses specifically for the target group, engage in active marketing using innovative methods such as a booth at a shopping centre.

Data from the survey indicate that grant recipients gain information about the program from a number of different sources, the most common being an adult education centre, a friend or relative or a course provider. The vast majority (93%) find the information they obtain to be useful or very useful.

Area for improvement

Concerns were raised by providers and survey respondents that parents who are eligible to apply for the grant may miss out on information about it, due to the way in which information about the program is currently distributed. The skewed distribution of grants across LGAs suggests that information may reach eligible parents in some regions more readily than in others.

Recommendation 2

A targeted marketing strategy be developed with the specific aim of increasing the number of grant recipients in regions where they are currently under-represented.

Is the program being administered effectively?

The administrative systems that underpin the operation of the grant program appear to work well overall. In consultations, providers were generally supportive of most current arrangements, reporting only minor concerns and issues. Comments by survey respondents expressed similar views.

Areas for improvement

Consultations with providers revealed that some work to secure as many grants as possible by directing additional staff resources to the speedy submission of applications on the day that grants are released. This practice means that parents applying through these providers have a much greater chance of securing a grant than those applying elsewhere. This is inequitable and may contribute to the skewed distribution of grants across LGAs.

Some providers expressed support for a grant allocation method based on quotas - a set number or proportion of grants in each round given directly to providers to allocate to applicants as they see fit over a set period – including to re-allocate if the recipient does not activate the grant. They indicated that this would make the application process easier to manage and enable them to offer greater certainty to applicants about the likely success of their application.

Recommendation 3

Consideration be given to the allocation of a proportion of grants directly to providers through a quota system. Investigations should consider: what proportion of total grants should be directly allocated to providers; and the basis for calculating quotas, e.g. the pattern of grant distribution over recent years and/or some form geographic and socio-economic indicators. The potential impact of a partial quota allocation system on the equitable distribution of grants according to need and geographic location should also be considered.

Providers commented that the PRTW ‘hotline’ (1300 telephone service) is often busy and if they need advice they must wait, or try to contact the program administrator through some other means. The program administrator advised that on average the service takes 1100 calls per month (about 37 per day). Unanswered calls are diverted to an answering system and calls returned but it is not always possible to contact callers.

Recommendation 4

Providers be instructed to use a direct line to contact the program administrator rather than the 1300 service, to reduce pressure on this service and leave it free for the use of grant applicants and recipients. If the program administrator indicates that they are required, additional resources be provided to staff this direct line and to expand the hotline service to ensure that the proportion of calls being diverted to the answering service is low.

Comments from survey respondents revealed several instances of grant applicants and recipients being given incorrect information about the program, including about providers and courses available and how the grant could be used. TAFE institutes and Centrelink were among the information sources named. Thus it appears that there is some confusion about the program even within organisations which provide advice to applicants and recipients and thus should be better informed.

Recommendation 5

Existing information about the program provided to stakeholder organisations be reviewed to determine if revisions are required to increase clarity and reduce misunderstandings. Current procedures for distributing updated information be reviewed to ensure that they are effective in ensuring the material reaches all stakeholder organisations in a timely fashion.

Providers reported that the process of submitting applications was unnecessarily complicated because the online application form does not mirror the paper application form which each applicant must complete. This causes some confusion and delays in submitting the required information.

Recommendation 6

That the online and paper application forms be aligned.

Providers also reported that they were not always certain about which study-related expenses could be claimed against the grant and needed to seek advice from the program administrator.

Recommendation 7

Clear guidelines on what can and cannot be claimed be prepared by the program administrator and distributed to providers.

The extent to which the program and its outcomes are monitored was an issue raised in consultations with both providers and DIIRD. Providers sought more information about the impact of their participation in the program, including student destinations, while longer-term outcomes for grant recipients particularly in relation to employment were mentioned by DIIRD.

Recommendation 8

The existing data collection system be expanded to enable a closer monitoring of the program and its impacts, with an emphasis on providing improved evidence of program outcomes and the early signalling of any potential problems – such as a skewed allocation of grants, or local difficulties for grant recipients in gaining employment. This could include:

-
- Where recipients gain program information
- Previous education attainment of grant recipients
- Longer-term employment outcomes of grant-funded study.
- Other post-study destinations (e.g. further study).

Enhancing benefits to grant recipients

In addition, to employment, Comments by survey respondents highlight a number of other ways in which grant recipients benefit from the PRTW program:

- *Enhancing skills* –after being out of the workforce for some time respondents believe their skills are no longer current or adequate. The grant enables them to update their skills, learn new skills and regain lost skills.
- *Gaining confidence* –through their grant-funded study parents gain in confidence and self-esteem. This enables them to take on a new range of activities, such as employment, starting their own business and re-engaging with the communities they live in.
- *Further study* – having completed their grant-funded study respondents are able to go on to further study.

Areas for improvement

In comments for the survey, grant recipients indicated that further information about jobs, careers and courses would help them in making decisions about careers and study.

The provision of advice to grant recipients about job opportunities in their local area, and associated training requirements and opportunities, could also serve to draw skill shortages to their attention, as well as assist them to make appropriate choices.

Recommendation 9

Methods be explored for providing grant recipients with additional information advice and guidance to assist them in selecting a career and course, including information about job opportunities and associated training requirements and opportunities in their local area.

As indicated by the survey, a small proportion of grant recipients (15%) take longer than six months after completing their grant-funded study to secure employment. A larger proportion of these than other recipients gain employment that is not related to the course/s they have completed, are employed casually and for ten hours a week or less. There is also a very small group of grant recipients (7%) who seek employment but are unsuccessful and give up looking for work. For both these groups, employment outcomes of their grant-funded study appear less than ideal and additional guidance in choosing a course that will lead to employment and obtaining suitable employment could prove beneficial.

Recommendation 10

The information that new grant recipients are given when they are awarded a grant be revised to include information about services available to assist them to gain employment after they have finished their study.

Respondents' comments on the survey identified a need for 'people to look at our resumes and skills and devise a program to get back into work'. Several specifically mentioned they that would have liked 'job placements' or 'work experience' as part of their study and others identified a need for employment services, such as assistance with preparing and submitting a resume.

Recommendation 11

Providers registered for the program be encouraged to incorporate work experience and employment preparation within the programs they offer, especially programs developed specifically for parents seeking to return to work.

About the program

The *Parents Returning to Work Program* is a Victorian government initiative which commenced in 2003. It provides grants to assist eligible parents who wish to return to paid employment after a period of caring for children to participate in training that will increase their work skills and job prospects.

Up to \$1000 per person is available and these funds can be used to meet course fees and other training-related costs for study materials and childcare. Eligibility is restricted to individuals who:

- have been caring for dependent children and have not worked for more than four months (full-time or equivalent part-time) during the last two years
- have at least one child 12 years or under
- are not currently employed and plan to return to paid work (full or part time) in the next 12 months
- previously held paid employment
- are Australian residents, living in Victoria

Individuals apply for a grant by completing an application form and a statutory declaration confirming their eligibility. These forms are available from training providers registered for the program and the program's website. Providers registered for the program include TAFE Institutes, Adult Community Education Centres, and other Registered Training Organisations.

Completed grant applications must be returned to registered providers and are submitted by them on the day a set of new grants is released, through an on-line system developed and maintained by the program administrator¹. Grants are released in January and June of each year. Demand for the grants exceeds supply so competition for each new round is fierce and becoming more so as further providers register for the program.

Individuals do not necessarily need to enrol in a training course with the training provider which submits their grant application. They are able to choose from courses delivered by any one of the providers registered with the Program – or they can use the grant towards payment of HECS for university study.

From the date the grant is awarded, recipients have three months to 'activate' the grant by making a claim. After this period, if not activated the funding is returned to the pool and may be used for a new grants round.

\$11 million was allocated to the program for distribution over the four years from 2003/4 to 2006/7 with the aim of providing assistance to around 10,000 individuals.

Evaluations of the program

The program has previously been evaluated twice – in 2004 and 2005. Conducted by RSM Bird Cameron, the first evaluation examined the pilot implementation of the program in 2003-4. Its recommendations gave particular attention to refining administrative aspects of the program to improve efficiency, equity and clarity. A number of changes were subsequently implemented.

¹ Currently Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES).

The second evaluation, conducted by the Equity Research Centre, assessed the program's effectiveness in achieving its aim of assisting parents to return to work. The evaluation noted high levels of satisfaction with the program among grant recipients, coupled with an increase in their employability. It identified employment, new skills and increased confidence as the most valuable outcomes of the program for grant recipients.

The evaluation made a number of recommendations for change to the program including improved data collection, increased integration of the program with Managed Individual Pathways initiatives and improved information to grant recipients on labour market opportunities.

This evaluation – aims and methodology

This evaluation of the program was commissioned as the program approached its fourth year and continuation of the program in its current form was under consideration. The evaluation aimed to review the achievements of the program and to identify whether it provided value for the money invested in it by the Victorian government. It also aimed to contribute to improvement of the program.

More specifically it aimed to provide recommendations for changes to the program that would:

- Ensure the program meets its objectives as effectively as possible and with optimum efficiency
- Enhance the effectiveness and efficiency with which the program is marketed and administered.
- Increase satisfaction among those involved with the program including grant recipients, program administrators and training providers by streamlining administrative arrangements and application procedures.
- Improve program outcomes for participants, including paid employment and other outcomes.
- Ensure that information about the program is accessible by all eligible Victorians.

The evaluation has comprised three major activities:

1. Data Analysis

An analysis of data provided by the program administrator about grant recipients (age, geographic location) the distribution of grants across Victorian local government areas (LGAs), the grants and claims processed by different types of providers (ACE, RTOs, TAFE and universities) and grants for accredited and non-accredited courses in industry areas from 2003-2006.

Additional data was also used to analyse the distribution of grants by LGAs by population (census data) and socio-economic status (SEIFA indicators).

2. Consultations

Consultations were conducted with a sample of providers registered under the program. Currently 377 providers are registered with the program administrator. Ten were chosen to represent different types of providers and a balance between those in regional and metropolitan locations. Providers that had processed fewer than 25 grants from 2003-2006 were excluded from consideration on the basis that those with greater experience of the program would be able to provide more useful information.

An initial list of providers was prepared and amended following feedback from D2RD and the program administrator, with several being substituted by more active program participants, based on the number of grants they had processed. These substitutions maintained the balance between providers of different types and in regional/metropolitan locations.

Similarly, an interview schedule was prepared and amended following feedback. It is attached as Appendix 2 to this report. The consultations aimed to identify any barriers or impediments providers might have encountered in processing applications or in dealing with applicants and any difficulties or problems in their dealings with the program administrator. They also sought from providers any suggestions for addressing any specific difficulties or improving the program.

Consultations were also conducted with staff of the Learner Access Branch and with the program administrator throughout the project. These helped to clarify program administrative arrangements, obtain access to data about the program and to gain feedback on various aspects of the work

3. Telephone survey of a sample of grant recipients

The program administrator conducts a mail survey of grant recipients prior to the expiry of their grant. On this survey respondents are asked to indicate if they are prepared to be contacted again.

For this evaluation it was decided to conduct a telephone survey to build a more detailed picture of grant recipients, the courses they chose, the reasons for their choices and the employment or other outcomes they achieved from their study. The survey would also provide respondents with an opportunity to comment on the program generally and on aspects of the program that might be improved.

Ideally, all grant recipients would have been approached to participate in the telephone survey. However, this was not possible within the time and funding limitations of the evaluation. Consequently, a target was set of 240 respondents. The program administrator provided a list of 614 people who were issued a grant between July 2003 and June 2005 and who had responded positively to the question about further contact. From this list, calling began to individuals selected at random. By the time calling concluded, 286 calls had been made successfully.

While the number of responses (286) collected exceeded the target, it is only a small proportion (4%) of the 8015 grants issued under the program from 2003/4 to 2005/6. Thus the survey results should be used cautiously. However, there are no indications within the survey data suggesting that the characteristics of grant recipients within the sample differ substantially from those of all grant recipients. For instance, the age profile of the surveyed recipients closely mirrors that evident in the data collected by the program administrator.

The questions used in the survey were drafted and amended in consultation with the Learner Access Branch of D2RD. They are attached as Appendix 3 to this report. The number of questions was limited by the time that could be devoted to each call. Thus some questions which could have elicited useful information were not able to be included, such as a

question about the previous educational attainment of grant recipients. This question could have revealed additional aspects to factors affecting the choice of course by grant recipients.

This report

This report documents the findings of this evaluation and concludes by identifying some areas where the program could be improved and makes recommendations for achieving improvements.

Section 1 is based on the data analysis and looks at who receives grants, where they live and how they use grant funding, as well as the regional distribution of grants by LGA, population, need and skills shortages.

Section 2 is based on consultations with ten providers registered for the program and outlines their views of aspects of the program including marketing and administration and their relationship with the program administrator.

Section 3 is based on the telephone survey of grant recipients and provides information about their household income, family structure, the courses they took, and employment or other outcomes. It also highlights the main themes and issues evident in their responses to open-ended questions about the program and ways in which it might be improved.

Section 4 summarises the main findings of the work addressing four key issues:

1. Is the program meeting its objectives?
2. Is the program being marketed effectively?
3. Is the program being administered effectively?
4. What benefits do individuals receiving a grant derive from their participation in the program and how might these be increased?

For each issue it identifies where the program has been particularly successful and some areas where improvements are possible.

1. The program and grant recipients

Collection of data about the distribution of the PRTW grants is carried out by the program administrator as part of its contractual obligations in administering the program on behalf of DIIRD.

Based on this data, the program administrator has provided regular reports to DIIRD about program participants (recipients and providers) and about the distribution of the grants and the use of grant funds.

For this project, this data and reports were received from the program administrator. Data for the years 2003/4, 2004/5 and 2005/6 were integrated to enable analysis of any changes over time.

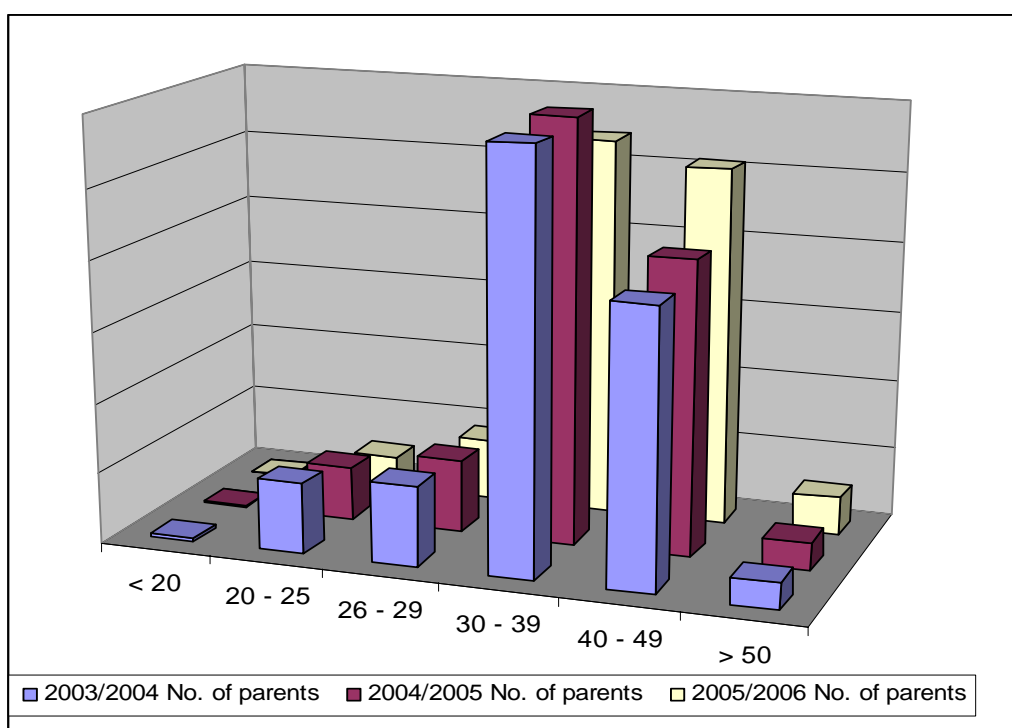
This chapter provides some aspects of a profile of grant recipients, (more will be discussed in the section reporting the results of the telephone survey) the location of grant recipients, the job areas of their study and the use of grant funds.

Grant recipients

Data collected by the program administrator indicate that the majority (95%) of grant recipients are female. The percentage of grants going to males has consistently remained at around five percent over the three years of the program.

Grant recipients also comprise mainly people aged 30-40 or 40-50 years (Figure 1).

Figure 1.1: Age profile of grant recipients by year grant awarded



The participation of 40-50 year olds has steadily increased from 2003/4 – 2005/6, while the participation of 30-40 year olds grew slightly from 2003/4 – 2004/5 but declined in 2005/6. Consequently the gap between the numbers in the two groups has narrowed considerably (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Number of grant recipients by year grant awarded, major age-groups

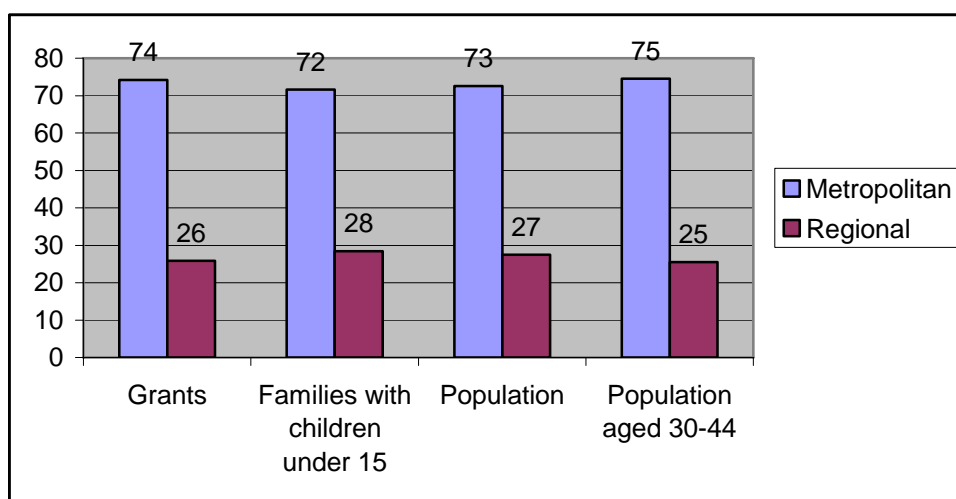
	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
30-40 year olds	1178	1197	1078
40-50 year olds	784	833	1019

The reasons for this change are unclear. The distribution of information about the grant may be a factor, as may the development by some providers of specific programs for parents seeking to return to work. (This will be discussed further in the next section). The older age group may have spent longer out of the workforce and be particularly responsive to such opportunities.

The location of grant recipients

Figure 1.2 shows the metropolitan/regional distribution of grants in relation to a number of demographic measures for Local Government Areas (LGAs). Some 26% of grants were allocated to persons in regional LGAs. The regional LGAs had much the same proportion of families with children aged under 15 (28%), of the total population (27%) and of persons aged 30 to 44 (25 %)

Figure 1.2: Percentage distribution of grants and population by Local Government Areas



There is however a quite uneven distribution of the grants to particular areas within regional and metropolitan areas. Grant recipients are most likely to reside in the southern, outer eastern and northern suburbs of Melbourne and outside the capital city are concentrated in the two regional centres of Greater Shepparton and Greater Geelong. Within the 26% of grants awarded to people in regional Victoria, over 10% were in Geelong and Shepparton.

The LGA with the largest group of grant recipients is Casey in Melbourne's outer east (8%), followed by Hume in Melbourne's north and Greater Shepparton (6%). Greater Geelong (5%); Greater Dandenong and metropolitan LGA Brimbank (4%) follow closely.

Of the ten LGAs receiving the largest share of grants awarded, eight are in metropolitan Melbourne. Greater Shepparton and Greater Geelong are the only regional LGAs in the group. These ten LGAs account for 44% of grants.

Table 1.2 and 1.3 have been prepared to give a more detailed view of the distribution of grants by LGAs. Details for all LGAs are given in Appendix 4.

The tables include the Socio-economic Index for Areas 2001 (SEIFA) Index of Disadvantage for each LGA. This index is prepared by the Australian Bureau of Statistics based on data from the 2001 census. (SEIFA Indexes based on the 2006 census may not be available for some time yet). The Index of Disadvantage 'is derived from attributes such as income, educational attainment, unemployment, and dwellings without motor vehicles. In particular it focuses on low income earners, relatively lower educational attainment and high unemployment.' (ABS).

Table 1.2 gives the details of 30 LGAs: ten with the highest ratio of grants to families with children aged under 15, ten around the median level of grants and ten with the lowest level of grants. The top ten are led by Greater Shepparton which had nearly 63 grants per 1000 families with children aged under 15, nearly twice the rate of the next LGA, Colac-Otway, and more than twice the rate for the other LGAs in the top ten. Overall the top ten averaged 30 grants per 1000 families with young children and just over three grants per 1000 of population. The average value of the SEIFA index for these LGAs was 987, just below the lower quartile value of the SEIFA of 990. However, five of the top LGAs had SEIFA values greater than 990 and three, Melbourne, Cardinia and Wyndham, had values greater than the median SEIFA value of 1006. There were three regional and seven metropolitan regions in the top ten ranked.

At the other end are ten regions with very low rates of grants. All are regional and have relatively small populations, though South Gippsland Shire, with the lowest rate of grants—and only two in total—has a greater population than Colac-Otway which has the second highest rate of grants and 69 in total.

Table 1.3 is provided to examine more closely the experience of the LGAs in the lowest quartile on the SEIFA Index of Disadvantage. Overall these LGAs receive 24% of grants. They have 27% of the population and have 28% of families with children under 15. There were about 12.7 grants per 1000 families with children under 15 compared with the average for all LGAs of 14.9. On average the LGAs with the greatest need as indicated by the SEIFA index have received a little less than their proportionate share of the grants.

But this is not true for all. Some, especially Shepparton, receive much more than the share expected from its population or families with young children. It is the variation within the group that is most notable. Dandenong and Hume as well as Shepparton received over 20 grants per 1000 families with young children, well above the average rate of grants. At the other lower end are Swan Hill, Mildura City and Central Goldfields with rates of less than 5 grants per 1000 families with young children.

The conclusion we draw from these data is that the distribution of grants seems to be only weakly linked to measures of need. There are a number of LGAs which rank low on the SEIFA index that

have received high levels of grants but there are also a number that have received very few grants indeed. And while there are some small LGAs that receive a relatively high number of grants, in general it appears that smaller regional LGAs do not fare well in the allocation.

Table 1. 2: Grants to February 2006 by selected LGAs and LGA characteristics

	LGA		No. of grants	% of grants	Population 2001	Grants per 1000 population	No of Families with children under 15	Grants per 1000 families with children under 15	SEIFA Index of Disadvantage
10 LGAs with highest rate of grants per family with children under 15									
22830	Greater Shepparton	regional	411	5.5%	55210	7.44	6577	62.5	977
21750	Colac-Otway	regional	69	0.9%	20089	3.43	2177	31.7	1003
24600	Melbourne	metropolitan	50	0.7%	67786	0.74	1947	25.7	1038
23270	Hume	metropolitan	423	5.7%	131585	3.21	17746	23.8	954
24650	Melton	metropolitan	168	2.3%	51824	3.24	7124	23.6	997
21610	Casey	metropolitan	567	7.6%	176075	3.22	24511	23.1	994
21450	Cardinia e	metropolitan	134	1.8%	45404	2.95	5920	22.6	1019
21950	Delatite (from 2002 Benalla & Mansfield)	regional	46	0.6%	21833	2.11	2117	21.7	1002
22670	Greater Dandenong	metropolitan	279	3.8%	124536	2.24	13282	21.0	877
27260	Wyndhamy	metropolitan	240	3.2%	85179	2.82	11490	20.9	1008
	Total or simple average		2387	32.10%	779521	Ave 3.06	92891	Ave 29.7	987
10 LGAs with grants per family with children under 15 about the median(11.2 per thousand)									
22620	Greater Bendigo y	regional	116	1.6%	86066	1.35	9820	11.8	990
27350	Yarra	metropolitan	52	0.7%	68018	0.76	4425	11.8	1014
20660	Banyule	metropolitan	137	1.8%	114222	1.20	11814	11.6	1058
27070	Whittlesea	metropolitan	164	2.2%	114082	1.44	14252	11.5	962
24410	Maroondah	metropolitan	123	1.7%	96461	1.28	11014	11.2	1053
23430	Kingston	metropolitan	149	2.0%	128171	1.16	13358	11.2	1024
24970	Monash	metropolitan	154	2.1%	156898	0.98	14336	10.7	1053
25490	Moyne	regional	18	0.2%	15059	1.20	1711	10.5	1032
26730	Warrnambool	regional	34	0.5%	28754	1.18	3256	10.4	1005
24130	Macedon Ranges	regional	46	0.6%	35666	1.29	4458	10.3	1058
	Total or s simple average		993	13.40%	843397	Ave 1.18	88444	Ave11.1	1025
10 LGAs with grants per family with children under 15 at the lowest levels									
26670	Towong	regional	2	0.0%	5972	0.33	627	3.2	1032
23350	Indigo	regional	5	0.1%	13928	0.36	1651	3.0	1027
23190	Horsham	regional	5	0.1%	17810	0.28	1991	2.5	1023
25810	Northern Grampians	regional	3	0.0%	12701	0.24	1355	2.2	1005
22980	Hindmarsh	regional	1	0.0%	6273	0.16	627	1.6	1006
21270	Buloke	regional	1	0.0%	6982	0.14	688	1.5	1031
27630	Yarriambiack	regional	1	0.0%	7760	0.13	813	1.2	1044
20260	Ararat Rural	regional	1	0.0%	11102	0.09	1145	0.9	1006
26610	Swan Hill	regional	2	0.0%	20710	0.10	2316	0.9	984
26170	South Gippsland	regional	2	0.0%	24597	0.08	2656	0.8	1017
	Total or simple average		23	0.20%	127835	Ave 0.18	13869	Ave1.7	1019

ALL LGAs Total or weighted average	7,425	4,644,972	Ave 1.60	499,846	Ave 14.9	1013
Median			1.18		11.15	1006
Unweighted average			1.29		11.93	1015

Source: Dept of Education and Australian Bureau of Statistics

Table 1.3: Grants to February 2006 by selected LGA and LGA characteristics for LGAs in the lowest quartile on the SEIFA Index of Disadvantage

LGA	metro/ regional	No. of grants	% of grants	Population 2001	Grants per 1000 population	Families with children under 15	Grants per 1000 families with children under 15	SEIFA Index of Disad- vantage
Greater Dandenong	metro	279	3.80%	124536	2.24	13282	21.01	877
Maribyrnong	metro	87	1.20%	59770	1.46	5615	15.49	915
Brimbank	metro	262	3.50%	163474	1.60	19616	13.36	919
Central Goldfields	regional	5	0.10%	12260	0.41	1226	4.08	948
Unincorporated				847	0.00	7	0.00	951
Hume	metro	423	5.70%	131585	3.21	17746	23.84	954
Latrobe	regional	112	1.50%	67022	1.67	8043	13.93	960
Whittlesea	metro	164	2.20%	114082	1.44	14252	11.51	962
Darebin	metro	175	2.40%	123848	1.41	11490	15.23	967
Greater Shepparton	regional	411	5.50%	55210	7.44	6577	62.49	977
Mount Alexander	regional	17	0.20%	16174	1.05	1763	9.64	978
Mildura Rural	regional	22	0.30%	48386	0.45	5686	3.87	980
Glenelg	regional	12	0.20%	19289	0.62	2273	5.28	981
Wodonga Rural	regional	54	0.70%	31010	1.74	3854	14.01	982
East Gippsland	regional	69	0.90%	38028	1.81	3855	17.90	984
Swan Hill	regional	2	0.00%	20710	0.10	2316	0.86	984
Moreland	metro	233	3.10%	131359	1.77	12135	19.20	985
Pyrenees	regional	4	0.10%	6360	0.63	614	6.51	988
Hobsons Bay	metro	84	1.10%	80432	1.04	8995	9.34	989
Bass Coast	regional	17	0.20%	24076	0.71	2257	7.53	989
Total or weighted average		1799	24.10%	1268458	Ave 1.42	141602	Ave 12.70	Ave 953

Source: Data from Learner Access Branch DIIRD and ABS

The skewed geographic distribution of grant recipients was also evident in the data from this project's survey of grant recipients. At the time they were awarded the grant, the recipients participating in the survey resided in 55 local government areas throughout Victoria, but there were 14 LGAs with only one recipient and another 22 with five recipients or less. Seven LGAs each had more than 10 recipients and accounted for more than 30% of all survey respondents. With 17 recipients the Casey LGA, appeared to have a particularly disproportionate share of recipients

One reason for the skewed distribution of grants may be the resources which some providers are able to bring to the application process. Discussions for this project with staff at Chisholm revealed that the institute works to maximise success for its applicants by re-allocating available staff to the submission process on the day that grants are released. Another related reason may be the variation in the extent to which potential recipients learn of the availability of the grants.

To more closely align the grant with measures of need it seems that some criteria on need should be included in the allocation process. This is considered in the conclusions to the report. It could be that say 70% of grants could be allocated on the current basis. If the resulting distribution is skewed as shown in the Tables 1.2 and 1.3 then the remaining 30% of grants could be allocated to LGAs or to clusters of LGAs according to demographic features of the LGAs and the value of the SEIFA Index of disadvantage.

The grants should help parents returning to work to train for areas of skill shortages. Data considered in section 3 of this report suggest that it has done this well. A high proportion of the grant recipients who responded to our telephone survey had obtained work and the areas in which they have trained seem to generally align with areas of identified need.

In an attempt to gain some additional insight on the extent to which grants were helping to meet skill needs the data on LGAs assembled for this report have been grouped in Table 1.4 for the 11 regions that were considered in the recent Regional Skills Shortage Survey.

Table 1.4: Grants to February 2006 by RMIF regions and their characteristics

	No. of grants	% of grants	Population 2001	Grants per 1000 population	No of Families with children under 15	Grants per 1000 families with children under 15	SEIFA Index of Disadvantage Average
<i>RMIF regions</i>							
Goulburn Murray region	518	6.9%	124466	4.16	14034	36.91	992
North East region	108	1.5%	65307	1.65	6151	17.56	1013
Geelong and Colac region	455	6.1%	241446	1.88	26414	17.23	1042
Warrnambool and district	52	0.7%	43813	1.19	4967	10.47	1019
Bendigo and Region	203	2.7%	172242	1.18	19521	10.40	994
Gippsland region	169	2.2%	150432	1.12	16982	9.95	994
Wodonga region	61	0.8%	50910	1.20	6132	9.95	1014
Southern Grampians and Glenelg	24	0.4%	35798	0.67	4021	5.97	1006
Ballarat and region	39	0.5%	80045	0.49	8855	4.40	993
Mildura region	22	0.3%	48386	0.45	5686	3.90	980
Wimmera Grampians region	18	0.2%	66561	0.27	7040	2.56	1013
Swan Hill and region	2	0.0%	20710	0.10	2316	0.90	984
<i>Other regional LGAs</i>							
Wellington and East Gippsland	137	1.8%	77315	1.77	8260	16.59	995
Corangamite	27	0.4%	16673	1.62	1839	14.70	1025

Moorabool	42	0.6%	23877	1.76	3078	13.60	1017
Mitchell Murrindindi	29	0.4%	40652	0.71	4870	5.95	1006
Gunnawarra and Buloke	10	0.1%	18376	0.54	1854	5.39	1024

Source: Data from Learner Access Branch DIIRD, ABS and DVC 2006 Regional Skills Shortage Survey

RMIF is regional migration incentive fund. 11 regions defined for this activity comprised 36 of 48 regional LGAs and these regions were used in the skills shortage survey. The Department of Victorian Communities (DVC) 2006, Regional Skills Shortage Survey - www.employment.vic.gov.au/

Through interviews with employers, the DVC collected a range of information relating to recruitment difficulties, skills in demand, and unfilled vacancies by major industry and for the occupations where vacancies were the most difficult to fill.

This information is important and should inform the advice on jobs provided to grant applicants. It would be difficult to actually allocate the grants according to measures of skill need or unfilled vacancies. For example in the DVC survey the proportion of vacancies that are hard to fill was high in the retail industry, but the overall number of vacancies in retail was not high and the future growth of employment and of recruitment activity was moderate (CSV 2006 pp6-9)

The findings in the survey do however tend to reinforce the suggestion that the allocation of grants across the state should be adjusted somewhat from that occurring at present. For example, as shown earlier, Swan Hill is in the bottom quartile on the SEIFA index. Swan Hill residents obtained hardly any grants. However the Regional Skills Shortage Survey shows the Swan Hill and region to have the highest proportion of vacancies unfilled and the highest expectation of recruitment in the next 12 months.

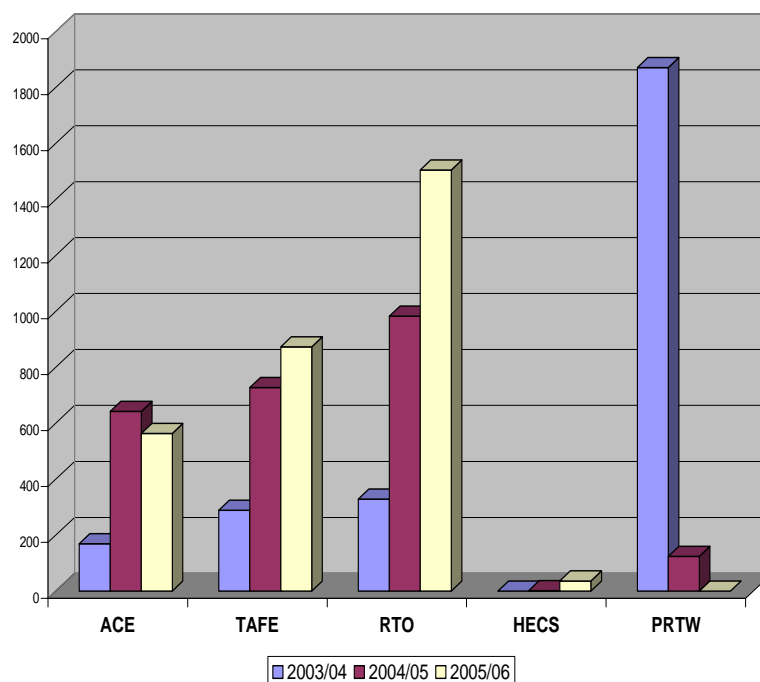
At very least, steps should be taken to make sure that areas such as Swan Hill receive a reasonable share of the grants, taking account of population and the indications of disadvantage.

Grants and claims

Over the first three years of the program, 8015 grants were processed. The number of grants processed by each type of provider from 2003-4 to 2005-6 is illustrated in Figure 1.3. In the first year (2003-4) the program administrator manually processed a large number of the 2475 grants as the website was not operational for the first few months. (This manual processing is indicated in the figure as “PRTW”.)

Excluding this first year of operation, the figure indicates strong growth in the number of grants handled by RTOs over the three year period, an initial increase in the number through ACE providers but a later decline, and small but steady growth over the three years in the number handled by TAFE institutes.

Figure 1.3: Number of grants by financial year and provider



Over the three years of the program, 59% of grants were issued through RTOs, 24% through TAFE institutes and 18% through ACE providers.

The average spent on each grant rose over the three years, from \$702.00 in 2003/4 to \$820 in 2005/6. Grants are spent mainly on course fees. Over the three years of the program, claims for fees have accounted for at least 85 per cent of all claims. In 2005-06 claims for course fees accounted for 93 per cent of all claims, though reporting for this year concludes in April 2006. Accredited courses account for three quarters of all course claims.

The total amount claimed each year against accredited courses is three times that claimed against non-accredited courses – and this ratio has been reasonably steady across the three years of the program. Claims for non-accredited courses over the three years averaged just over \$406,000 p.a. while claims for accredited courses averaged \$1,196,200 p.a. By themselves, these results do not necessarily mean that more grant recipients choose accredited than non-accredited courses – although the difference between the amounts claimed strongly suggests this. A possibility is that the difference may merely reflect higher charges for accredited programs. However, as will be discussed later, this project's survey of grant recipients found that for their first grant-funded course, two-thirds of recipients chose an accredited program, with the proportion choosing a non-certificated program rising for second and third grant-funded courses.

Private RTOs have markedly increased their overall share of claims for both forms of training over the three years (see Figure 4 below), while the share of both TAFE and ACE providers has declined. The decline has been particularly marked among the TAFE institutes with claims for course fees declining from \$513,309 to \$293,282 p.a. over the three years of the program.

In addition to course fees, grant recipients are able to make claims for training related costs. These types of claims are made mainly by those enrolling in TAFE Institutes. By comparison, the level of training related costs claimed through ACE providers and private RTOs is low. (Note: TAFE and

ACE providers are obliged to charge the appropriate course fee, while materials need to be accounted for separately. RTOs can include the training costs within the course fee.) However, even in the TAFE sector, claims relating to training related costs have declined significantly over the three years (from \$169,461 in 2003-04 to \$71,267 in 2005-06).

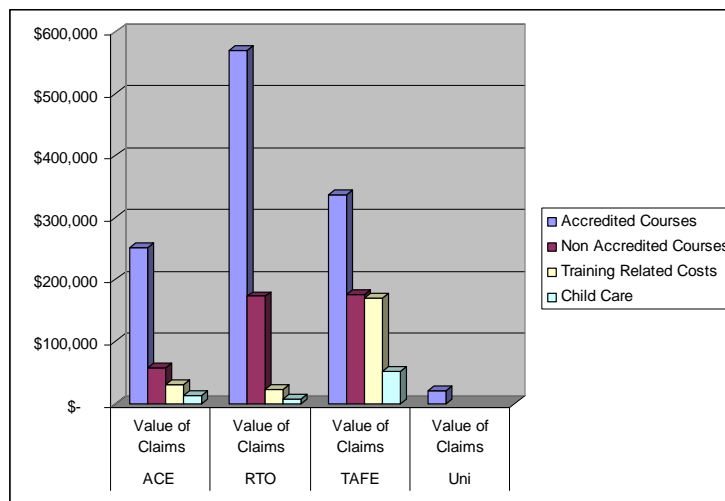
Claims for childcare have also declined over the three years of the program. They initially comprised a small but notable component of claims through TAFE institutes at 7% of their claims, but this has progressively declined to comprise only 4% of claims through TAFEs by 2005-06. Childcare claims from all sectors have declined overall from \$72,004 in the first year to \$24,959 by the third year. The reduction in claims is unlikely to reflect any lessening of the need for childcare, but may simply be a function of the increase in amounts claimed for course fees.

Differences in the patterns of claims made through TAFEs and RTOs can be attributed to different fee structures and arrangements. Firstly, grant recipients who enrol in TAFE are eligible for significant fee discounts if they are pensioners or from low-income families. These discounts can mean that only a small proportion of their grant needs to be used for course fees, leaving a large amount available to be used for materials or childcare. Grant recipients enrolling with an RTO may use a larger proportion of their grant for course fees, leaving a smaller amount for materials and childcare.

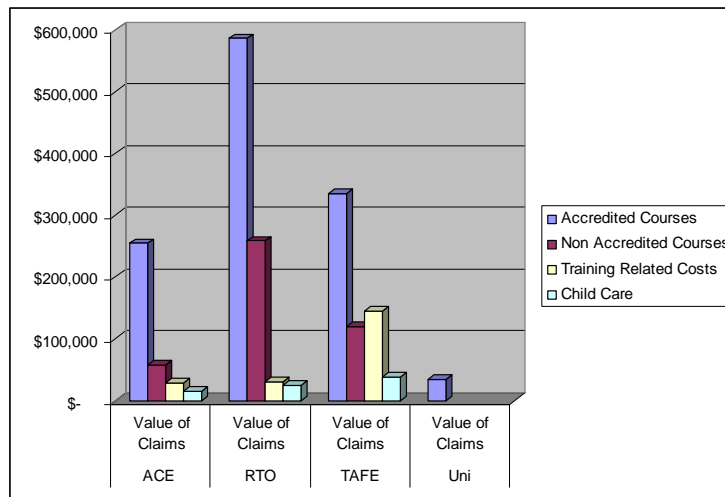
Secondly, course fees charged by RTOs are often inclusive of training materials, while many TAFE courses charge students additional fees for such resources.

Thirdly, different courses have different resource requirements.

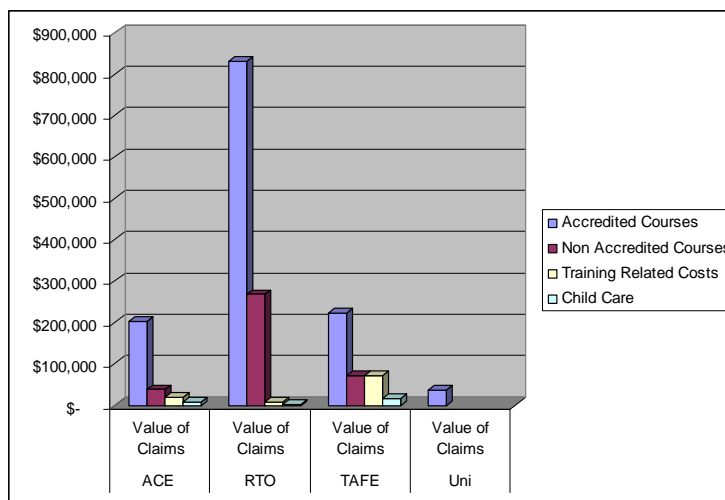
Figure 1.4: Claims processed by type and provider 2003-04



2004-2005



2005-06



Grants from unexpended funds

Not all grant recipients activate their grants, or use all of the \$1000 available to them. By the end of the 2005-6 financial year, \$6.425million had been claimed, compared with a projected total of \$8.25m.

Unspent funds have been used to provide additional grants on top of the annual allocation of 2475. Of the 8015 grants awarded in the three financial years from 2003 to 2006, 680 were additional grants funded from unexpended funds. In 2003/04, 2475 grants were released. A further 180 were processed from unspent funds later in the financial year. In 2005/06, in addition to the 2,475 grants an additional 500 grants were processed from unspent funds in June 2006, totaling 2,975 grants distributed in the financial year (Table 1.5).

Consultations with DIIRD advised that a process for allocating any remaining unspent funds was in place.

Table 1.5: Annual number of grants awarded

	2003-2004	2004 - 2005	2005- 2006
Normal grants	2475	2475	2475
Additional grants	180	0	500
	2655	2475	2975

Grant-funded courses

Based on course fee claims, grant recipients appear to select courses in similar fields irrespective of whether they enrol in accredited or non-accredited courses. The exception is Community and Health, which generally requires accredited courses as a means of entry to the industry.

Table 1.6 shows that courses in information technology (mainly computer courses relating to the use of software packages such as Excel and Word) are the most popular choice of course among grant recipients, and in 2005-06 accounted for 63 percent of all non-accredited course claims, a percentage that has steadily increased over the past three years. The only other sectors with enrolments of any significance in non-accredited courses are Business Services (13%); and Communication / Personal Development (12%).

Table 1.6: Enrolments in non-accredited courses by industry area and grant year

<i>Non Accredited Courses</i>	2003-4	2004-5	2005-6
Information technology & Communications	44%	52%	63%
Communication/Personal Development	20%	15%	12%
Business Services	9%	13%	13%
All others	27%	20%	12%
All	100%	100%	100%

In 2005-06 most claims in accredited courses related to enrolments in Community and Health (33%), followed by Communication and Personal Development (19%), Business Services (18%) and Information Technology, (18%). Traditional trade areas, hospitality and retail attract relatively few enrolments.

The high level of participation in courses in Community and Health reflects interest among grant recipients in work in children's services and aged care, both fields in which there are skills shortages. Enrolments in Business Services are primarily in Business administration, accounting, bookkeeping and finance; fields with strong prospects of employment.

Table 1.7: Enrolments in accredited courses by industry area and grant year

<i>Industry area</i>	<i>2003-4</i>	<i>2004-5</i>	<i>2005-5</i>
Community & Health	25%	32%	33%
Communication/Personal Development	19%	17%	19%
Information Technology & Communications	19%	17%	18%
Business Services	17%	17%	18%
All Others	20%	17%	12%
All	100%	100%	100%

2. The program from the providers' perspective

"Overall, it's a wonderful program"
(RTO representative)

There are 377 providers registered for the Parents Returning to Work program. Ten RTOs were selected for interview for this project, of which three were TAFE providers, three ACE providers, and four private providers. Those selected provided a representative cross-sectoral sample, included three non-metropolitan RTOs, and in most cases had each processed more than 50 grants.

A list of the providers interviewed and the interview schedule are attached as appendices 1 and 2 to this report.

The value of the program

While providers indicate that they incur some administrative costs in processing applications and managing claims under the program, they also indicate that they believe these are more than offset by the benefits to individual grant recipients and their communities that flow from it. There is thus strong support among providers for the continuation of the Parents Returning To Work (PRTW) program.

Of the providers interviewed, less than half charged a small administrative fee to offset some of the costs they incur in processing applications and claims. This fee is then charged back against the grant. This fee is usually less than \$50. Other providers charge no fee, absorbing any costs.

The view of provider representatives in all sectors is that the provision of the PRTW grants positively influences the decision of parents to enrol in training. They asserted that without a grant a large number of these parents would not be able to enrol in training and gave examples of students who had enrolled in a TAFE course, but when missing out on a grant had subsequently withdrawn from the course because they were unable to meet the costs involved in study.

Receipt of a grant does not guarantee a place in a course at TAFE institutes. In some instances, those receiving a grant are unable to secure a place in their chosen course. Some are counselled into alternative courses, but others withdraw and the grant is not activated. This problem appears to occur in TAFE institutes with large enrolments, but not in ACE providers or private RTOs. An inability to engage in their first preference course was an issue of concern to a number of respondents to this project's survey of grant recipients.

Marketing the program

With demand for grants under the PRTW program exceeding supply, providers indicate that they do relatively little formal marketing of the PRTW grant program. They make use of brochures and posters provided by the program administrator, but are generally reluctant to market the program overtly when grants cannot be guaranteed to applicants, and the program has regularly been oversubscribed.

Providers believe that as a result, it is possible that there may be large numbers of eligible parents who are not aware of the program or the opportunities it offers. In their view, applicants find out about the program primarily through word of mouth. They also receive referrals from Centrelink and the Job Network, though they believe the number of resulting applications is relatively small.

Some of the private RTOs and ACE providers use innovative means of informing potential applicants, such as school-based information strategies, or outreach to shopping centres. ACE providers also tend to ensure that everyone attending the centre is advised of the availability of grants.

Active marketing by private RTOs is more evident where they have specifically tailored a course for PRTW grant recipients. Examples of proactive marketing of courses customized specifically for potential grant recipients included a provider setting up promotional booths at shopping centres in lower socio-economic areas to advertise both the course and the availability of the grants; and a regional provider marketing the combination of course and grant in the local newspaper.

TAFE institutes, on the other hand, tend not to pro-actively market the program, as their courses are frequently already fully subscribed, and they have not developed courses specifically for the PRTW market.

It should be noted that providers do not systematically collect information on how grant recipients found out about the program. The information on the relative effectiveness of marketing from the provider viewpoint is anecdotal rather than systematic. However, we asked this question of respondents to our survey of grant recipients and findings are discussed later in this report.

Eligibility requirements

Current grant eligibility requirements are considered to be appropriate from the provider perspective.

The absence of means testing is generally supported across both public and private providers. There is some very limited support for means testing the grants, but the majority advocate continuation of the present eligibility requirements. Even those dealing with highly disadvantaged groups argue that means testing the grants should not be introduced. The point made by one ACE provider is that there are almost no alternative forms of government support for mothers with working partners wanting to return to work. If means testing was to be introduced, then the cut-off level should be set at a height that would allow the majority to qualify.

The verification process, using Statutory Declarations, is also generally regarded as a satisfactory approach, though providers raised several issues associated with their use:

- The legal significance is not so well understood in some ethnic communities;
- The need to provide a declaration that has been signed within the last month causes problems for some providers leading up to the January application day, as applicants are difficult to contact and chase up over the holiday period.
- There is a very small percentage of applicants who obtain a signed declaration without understanding that they are technically ineligible for a grant. For these applicants, earlier advice would save time and effort.

However, these are minor issues, and providers regard the application and verification process as simple and generally straightforward.

Administering the grants program

Providers take a 'first come, first served' approach to grant applications, mirroring the overall grant distribution process used by the program administrator. There is little or no prioritising of grant applications on a needs basis within providers. One or two providers do make some minor adjustments to the order of applications, based on their own assessment of needs.

One RTO, which had created a separate class for women who required intensive ESL training, ensured that prospective students were placed near the top of their list of applicants for grants. A second RTO ensured that some prospective students who were considered to be most unable to meet course fees without a grant were given a higher position in their listing than would otherwise have occurred. However, such examples appear to be exceptions to the general approach of 'first come, first served'.

With no system-wide guidelines available by which to prioritise needs, providers simply accept applications in the order in which individuals apply, minimizing additional administrative requirements on their own staff.

The grant distribution process favours those providers able to direct additional resources to the submission of applications on the day that grants are released. Some private providers in particular hire many additional staff (up to 18 people in one case) so that they can submit as many applications as possible as quickly as possible and thus maximize their success rate. This raises an equity issue, in that parents applying through a provider which employs many people to process applications have a much greater chance of securing a grant than if they apply through a provider that does not.

Providers believe that the grant distribution process needs to be reviewed. The uncertainty of the process and the extent to which it is locked in to specific dates makes the process difficult for them to manage. They indicated that with each cycle of grants, the tendency has been for the number of available grants to be allocated more quickly as providers have learned to allocate extra staff to submitting applications through the on-line system. They expect that the time taken to process all grants will contract further in subsequent releases.

There is some support for an allocation approach that would grant quotas to providers (based either on the pattern of grants over recent years or some form of geographic and socio-economic distribution). Certainly, greater certainty on grant numbers strongly appealed to providers, and would enable them to manage relationships with grant applicants more effectively.

Providers report difficulty in managing the expectations of applicants who, despite being eligible, miss out on grants. Many encourage these individuals to apply again in subsequent rounds, but would like to be able to offer greater certainty about the likelihood of success of a subsequent application. One suggested that if a set number of grants was allocated to it, any that were not activated could be easily re-assigned to these initially unsuccessful applicants.

Concessions apply to large numbers of grant recipients enrolled in TAFE courses. Staff interviewed at each of the three TAFE institutes estimated that up to 50% of the grant recipients who enrolled with them were eligible for concessions and thus were paying fees of less than \$100 per course. This was the case with 38% of the student population at the Gordon Institute of TAFE. It thus appears that the program is successful in reaching many individuals from low-income households. Information about grant recipient incomes was collected in our telephone survey and is discussed further later in this report.

Such concessions are not normally available to grant recipients enrolling with RTOs. This difference may help to explain the pattern in the value of grant claims observed earlier in figure 4, with the value of RTO claims substantially exceeding claims made through TAFE.

How providers contribute to the program

In addition to managing the expectations of applicants and administering applications and claims, providers have contributed to the intended outcomes of the PRTW program in a number of ways.

Firstly, private RTOs have used the program as an impetus to developing and introducing courses specifically designed for the program's client group – parents wanting to return to work. These courses include both pre-employment short courses, and customized certificate courses, such as in interviewing skills, preparing job applications and computer skills. In some cases courses have also been tailored to meet the needs of local industry. For instance one provider customised a Certificate 2 from the Hospitality Training Package to meet the needs of employers within the local region. This work helps to explain the success of grant recipients in gaining employment related to the course/s they have completed – which is among the findings of our telephone survey of respondents.

Secondly, some ACE providers have expanded the number of places in courses that they were already delivering to accommodate the extra numbers applying for places as a result of the PRTW program, and have also responded to demand by introducing higher level certificates that offer increased vocational outcomes.

While private RTOs have introduced courses specifically for grant recipients, ACE providers and TAFE institutes in particular have tended to absorb them into their existing programs, including short courses, access programs and all levels of certificate courses.

Thirdly, there are also a number of examples of private RTOs combining training and employment services for parents under their PRTW strategy. Three of the four private providers interviewed had combined training for eligible parents with either placement opportunities within their organization, or assistance with gaining employment upon completion of their courses (in the hospitality, hairdressing, and business services industries). As will be discussed later, our survey of grant recipients identified that many sought improved career guidance and greater assistance in finding suitable employment. The provision of these types of services by private providers may thus help to explain why RTOs have processed the largest share of grants over the three years of the program (59%, compared with 24% for TAFEs and 18% for ACE providers).

Fourthly, providers offer advice to grant recipients about how much grant funding they have left, and how best to use it. Grant recipients must expend the funds within 12 months. While the recipients are able to check their own grant balances on the PRTW website, providers indicate that many prefer to come to them to gain this information. Some providers actively encourage grant recipients to enrol in multiple courses in order to reduce their grant balance. For instance, they advise them to enrol in a sequence of short courses, or, if they are approaching the end of their 12 month grant period, to enrol in a course in the following year. Both providers and the program administrator actively contact students shortly before their grant expires to remind them of the possibility of utilising the remaining balance.

A side effect of this practice is that unused grant balances that potentially could be re-directed into subsequent grants for other parents end up being expended. However for the individual grant recipients involved there are benefits where enrolling in a second or third or greater course enables them to achieve a higher level qualification, and/or further skills and knowledge that will assist them to gain employment and other sought-after outcomes.

Tracking program outcomes

The interviews conducted with provider representatives suggest that courses related to business and computer skills have proved to be particularly popular with adults returning to work, not only because of the strong likelihood of positive vocational outcomes, but also due to the potentially more flexible work and employment arrangements for parents associated with these industries (for example compared with retail or hospitality).

Although providers contribute to the program and appear to assist in the effective administration of the grants system, there is very limited knowledge about the extent of course completions or employment outcomes. This is particularly the case with the larger public providers, where there may be numerous grant recipients enrolled in a variety of courses across the institute.

Providers collect and maintain information on the number of grant recipients and what course they enrol in, but are not required to record outcome information. Two of the four private RTOs interviewed reported that they did track employment outcomes for their own purposes, but were not requested to provide this information to the program administrator.

Assessing the effectiveness of the program in the future would be improved if systems were established (and resourced) to enable providers and/or the program administrator to report on course completions and vocational outcomes for those receiving grants.

Relationship between providers and the program administrator

Providers are in regular contact with the program administrator. Contact is regular throughout the year, but naturally peaks around the two periods of the year when grants are released.

Providers interviewed report that staff employed by the program administrator have been responsive, helpful, and capable of addressing problems and issues. The 1300 general telephone enquiry line (available to parents) is reportedly difficult to access², but the direct lines to the administrator (available to RTOs) have worked effectively.

The use of grants to pay for learning materials associated with the course constitutes something of a “grey area” in which providers have needed to frequently refer back to the program administrator for guidance or re-assurance. Recurring questions raised included whether computer ‘memory sticks’ as well as general items of stationery constitute a valid claim. In other cases, provider staff were unsure if course excursions were legitimately able to be claimed as a learning material cost. The program administrator was generally able to resolve the validity of claims on a case by case

² The program administrator describes the 1300 number as ‘virtually a direct line’ for parents. It appears to be a high traffic line: 1100 calls per month were received on average for the first six months of 2006. All calls which go to message bank are returned.

basis, but it might make it easier for providers to determine which claims are legitimate if they were issued with guidelines listing the types of learning materials that could be claimed³.

There are mixed reports on the quality and friendliness of the PRTW website, which is maintained by the program administrator. Most providers report that the website is easy to use and accessible, but a couple of the providers processing large numbers of grants were more critical. One suggested improvement was that the on-line grant application form should mirror the written application received by the provider, so that the data entry process would be simplified.

³ The program administrator advised that an introductory package provided to parents when they receive a grant includes a summary of what can and can't be claimed and that this information is also published on the PRTW website.

3. Report on survey of grant recipients

A survey was conducted by telephone of 286 grant recipients selected at random from a list of over 600 grant recipients who had indicated in previous surveys conducted by the program administrator on the conclusion of the 12 month grant period that they would be happy to be contacted again about the program.

The program administrator regularly collects information about grant recipients. The survey provided an opportunity to obtain some additional or more detailed information, particularly in relation to longer-term employment outcomes of their study.

About recipients

At the time they received the grant, more than 80 percent of survey respondents were under 45 years of age, with a very large group (65%) aged 35 to 44 (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Age of survey respondents when grant received

<i>Age group</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
18 to 24	6	2.1
25 to 34	43	15.0
35 to 44	187	65.3
45 to 54	49	17.1
54 Plus	1	0.3
All	286	100.0

Table 3.2 indicates the total pre-tax income of recipient households at the time the grant was awarded. Around 55% of recipients were in a household with a pre-tax income of less than \$40,000 at the time they received the grant.

Table 3.2: Total household pre-tax income when grant was received

<i>Income</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
Less than \$20,000	83	29.0
Between \$20,000 and \$39,999	74	25.8
Between \$40,000 and \$59,999	67	23.4
Between \$60,000 and \$79,999	19	6.6
Between \$80,000 and \$99,999	14	4.9
Between \$100,000 and \$140,000	5	1.7
More than \$140,000	3	1.0
no answer	21	7.3
All	286	100

In May 2004, average weekly total earnings for adults were \$756.50 (ABS 6306.0), or approximately \$39,500 per annum. In August 2006 the equivalent figures was \$1051.30 per week,

approximately \$54,000 p.a. (ABS 6302.0). Thus at the time they received the grant the majority of grant recipients lived in a household with a pre-tax income below the average weekly earnings for a single adult. In addition, nearly 30 percent lived in a household with a very low income – below \$20,000 p.a.

Thus the program is successful in providing support for work-related education and training to many individuals with limited financial resources.

Compared with the general population, single parents were somewhat over-represented among survey respondents. Some 24% of the respondents to the survey were single parents when they received the grant, which is higher than their percentage of families with dependent children (around 20% for Victoria, ABS 6224.0). This may help to explain in part the high proportion of recipients living in a household with a low income.

Number and age of children

To be eligible to receive a PRTW grant, applicants must have at least one child under 12 years of age living with them. In order to gain a more detailed picture of their parental responsibilities, survey respondents were asked if they had any children aged under 15 years living with them when they were awarded the grant, and the age of these children.

The average number of children per grant recipient was 2.17. A third of survey respondents (33%) had one or more children of pre-school age (0-4 years). Nearly three-quarters had children of primary school age (5-10 years) and 45% had older children (Table 3.3). Given the large numbers reporting children of primary school age or younger, it appears that many are likely to have continued substantial parental responsibilities beyond the expiration of their PRTW grant. These might have some impact on their employment preferences.

Table 3.3: Grant recipients - number with children in three age groups

	<i>1 child</i>	<i>2 children</i>	<i>3 or more</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>0-4 years</i>	71	20	2	93	32.52
<i>5-10 years</i>	107	88	15	210	73.43
<i>11-14 years</i>	91	30	8	129	45.10

Learning about the program

As noted earlier, providers interviewed for this project expressed a belief that grant applicants heard about the program primarily through word of mouth, while a few were referred by Centrelink or Job Network.

In the survey, respondents were asked about where they first heard about the PRTW Program and were able to choose from six options: a TAFE institute, an adult education centre, a counsellor, a friend or relative, the internet, or 'other'. Surprisingly, the proportion indicating a TAFE institute was less than 10 percent and only one recipient indicated either a Counsellor, or the Internet. Just over a fifth of recipients first heard about the program at an adult education centre, and a slightly smaller group from a friend or relative. However, the largest group of recipients (46%) indicated 'Other' sources (Table 3.4).

Asked to nominate these sources, recipients pointed to newspapers, particularly local newspapers (approximately 20 recipients), newsletters from schools or kindergartens (approximately 11 recipients) and Centrelink (10 recipients). Additional sources were community centres, local councils and a stand in a shopping centre. It thus appears that many recipients first hear about the program from sources in their neighbourhood – particularly some of the innovative sources developed by private RTOs.

Table 3.4: Where recipients first heard about the program

<i>Information source</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
A TAFE institute	28	9.7
An adult education centre	65	22.7
A counsellor	1	0.3
A friend or relative	59	20.6
Internet	1	0.3
Other	132	46.1
All	286	100

Having been alerted to the existence of the program, many recipients (125) went on to obtain additional information from other sources. The most common of these was a course provider (40+ recipients). Around 23 sought information from the internet but only small numbers specifically indicated that they consulted the program’s internet site. Similar numbers consulted the program administrator (16)—especially the hotline—and Centrelink (16). Unusual sources of further information included MPs, the Premier’s department and local councils.

The evidence suggests recipients sought further information where they could, that a focus on internet-based material would reach only a small number of people, and that personal contact is important.

Respondents were asked how useful they found the information they received. The vast majority (80%) found this information ‘very useful’ or ‘a little useful’ (12%). Only eight respondents found it ‘not very useful’ and a further 13 ‘inadequate’. Thus the quality of the information about the program that respondents received appears to be high. (Table 3.5)

Those indicating that the information they received was ‘inadequate’ appeared to have learned initially about the program from newspaper sources. Those of them who had sought further information had consulted a variety of sources including a local health and community centre, a TAFE, a university and Centrelink. There was no pattern to the sources of information used by those recipients who indicated that the information they received was ‘not very useful’, with the exception that two of the eight recipients had consulted the internet for follow-up information.

Table 3.5: How useful was the information received?

<i>Usefulness of information</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
Very useful	230	80.4
A little useful	35	12.2
Not very useful	8	2.8
Inadequate	13	4.5
TOTAL	286	100

The importance of the grant

An important question in considering the role of the PRTW program is whether it enables individuals who would not otherwise have been able to participate in education or training to do so. Consultations conducted with providers for this project clearly indicated that they believed this was the case for many grant recipients – some withdrew an enrolment if they were unsuccessful in winning a grant - and this conclusion was also drawn by previous evaluations of the program.

In this survey nearly half of participating grant recipients (47.5%) indicated that they would not have enrolled in their first course but for the grant. Though substantial, this proportion is slightly lower than might be expected from previous evidence. However, the survey indicated that a substantial number of recipients use the grant for multiple courses and the proportion indicating they would not have been able to enrol without the grant rises substantially for second and third courses (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Would recipient have enrolled if they did not receive the grant?

<i>Course</i>	<i>Would have enrolled</i>		<i>Would not have enrolled</i>		<i>All</i>
	No	%	No	%	No
Course one	148	52.5	134	47.5	282
Course two	53	39.6	81	60.4	134
Course three	24	30	56	70	80

Course Choice

The program evaluation by the Equity Research Centre expressed concern about what it saw as a lack of alignment between the courses chosen by grant recipients and areas of labour market opportunities and shortages. It noted that grant recipients undertook training mainly in areas that traditionally employ large numbers of female workers and which tend to have an oversupply of labour.

As discussed earlier, the data provided for this project by the program administrator indicate that information technology courses not only remain popular among grant recipients but have increased in popularity over the life of the program. Courses in Business and Community and Health also remain popular.

This survey confirmed that the most popular courses were in information technology, business, and education (especially integration aide, workplace assessment and training), followed by Care (aged care, child care) and other nursing/health, hospitality and hairdressing. Courses chosen by very small numbers of grant recipients were in fitness, retail, driving and horticulture. There were also some unusual course choices: one recipient enrolled for a Masters Degree in Business and another for a course in welding and machining. The preference for accredited courses was also clear. For their first, and in some cases only, course, around 40% of recipients chose a program at certificate 3 or higher level. A third took a non-certificated course (Table 3.7).

Table 3.7: First course, course level

<i>Course 1</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
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Non certificated	96	33.9
Certificate 1	37	13.0
Certificate 2	30	10.6
Certificate 3	62	21.9
Certificate 4	31	10.9
Diploma	20	7.0
Degree	7	2.4
	283	100

Multiple courses

The survey asked respondents to indicate the course or courses for which they had used the PRTW grant. About half of all the respondents (141 persons) indicated that they used the grant for a second course and more than a quarter for an additional third course (83 persons).

The survey was restricted to collecting information about only the first three courses. However comments from respondents suggested that it was possible to stretch the grant funding over a much higher number of courses. For instance, one respondent indicated having completed 15 short courses.

The proportions undertaking multiple courses might have been higher if some recipients had not been engaged full-time or long-term programs, which made it difficult for them to fit in a second or third program within the period of the grant. In addition, recipients using the grant to cover high cost fees for a first course would have had little to no funds remaining to spend on a second.

The proportion of recipients choosing a non-certificated program was much higher for second (60%) and third courses (70%) than for the first course (34%).

Table 3.8: Course level course 2, course 3

	<i>Course two</i>		<i>Course three</i>	
	No	%	No	%
Non certificated	84	59.1	58	69.8
Certificate 1	13	9.1	7	8.4
Certificate 2	15	10.5	6	7.2
Certificate 3	16	11.2	9	10.8
Certificate 4	4	2.8	3	3.6
Diploma	9	6.3	-	
Degree	1*	0.7	-	
	142	100	83	100

Repeated course combinations included short programs based on computer software, such as: MS Word, followed by MS Excel and MS Powerpoint. Some recipients had also put together courses offering complementary skills, such as a business course with another in IT or first aid. Small numbers followed an initial Cert 1 or Cert 2 course with another at a higher level in the same or a related field.⁴

⁴ A strategic course combination put together by one recipient comprised a course in resume writing with another in job search strategy and a third in interview techniques

The largest group of survey respondents who undertook two programs (61 persons) chose a non-accredited program for both their first and second course, but 23 others combined a non-certificated second course with a certificated first course. Ten recipients who completed a Certificate 1 program for their first course went on to a Certificate 2 program for their second. Similarly eight who first completed a Certificate 2 went on to a Certificate 3 (Table 3.9).

Table 3.9: Course combinations by course level, course 1 and course 2

<i>Course 2</i>	Non-accredited	Cert 1	Cert 2	Cert 3	Cert 4	Diploma	Degree	all
<i>Course 1</i>								
non-accredited	61	7	3	1	1	2		
Cert 1	10	3	10	1		2		
Cert 2	6	2		8				
Cert 3	2	1	2	4	2	1		
Cert 4	4			2		2		
Diploma	1				1	2		
Total	84	13	15	16	4	9	1	141

Reasons for course choice

Survey respondents were asked why they chose their particular course/s. Their responses suggested that most did so to obtain skills and qualifications that would help them to obtain work. Typical of these comments was:

Needed to increase my skills in those areas to get a job

Thought it would help me get a job in an office

Always had been interested but needed certificate to apply for jobs.

Many respondents talked about a need to refresh or update their skills, in some cases so that they could return to the area they were working in before they had children, for instance:

*Out of workforce for a few years and I wanted to update my skills for a better chance of getting a job
(Spreadsheets, Word for Windows 1 and 2 – ACE provider)*

*Out of workforce for a number of years and needed to upgrade. Interested in area. Did course to make myself employable.
(Student wellbeing – university short course)*

*Wanted to get back into office admin. Had not worked for 15 years and needed to update my skills
(Business Admin Cert 2 and Cert 3 – ACE provider)*

*I was from an office background and needed to refresh my skills.
(Returning to the Workforce, MYOB and basic book-keeping, ACE provider)*

*I need to work and I have a degree in psychology and really needed to get some recent skills
(Diploma of Professional Counselling, private provider)*

Before I had children I was a trainer with Coles Myer and needed to update my earlier qualifications

(Workplace Training and Assessment – ACE provider)

A need to regain lost confidence was also mentioned by a number of respondents:

*Enhance my skills. To say I have experience in this area and to have leverage to apply for jobs and also gives you confidence.
(IT for small business – private provider)*

*It was suggested to me and I thought it would be good in aged care. Also to gain my confidence.
(Cert 3 in Aged Care, private provider)*

*To get my confidence up and get me back into study mode. Thinking of going back into teaching.
(Personal Development, Dealing with Difficult People, Level 2 in First Aid)*

Some talked about the chance to get into a new field they had developed an interest in, or the need to seek new employment options because of outdated skills:

*Always loved gardening. Was a chef and hated it so when I re-entered the workforce I wanted to do something I loved
(Horticulture)*

*Was a nurse. Could not go back after 5 years of being out of the industry, so needed to do a course to assist with different employment options.
(Parents returning to work course – ACE provider)*

In some cases respondents had enjoyed volunteer work in a particular field and were looking for more regular employment of the same type. This was particularly common among those choosing to train as an Integration Aide:

Had been working as a volunteer integration aide and needed the certificate to get paid

Mainly through interest as I was doing volunteer work at the school where my kids were and knew there was a big need

Worked voluntarily with children's school and it was work I knew I would be able to do

Course choice was also based on a need to choose employment in an industry where work could be fitted around caring for their children:

*Out of workforce for 15 years due to raising children and needed to work in an industry that would fit in with the hours I needed.
(Cert 3 in Beauty)*

*Had two children and wanted to get back into the workforce that fitted in with children and school hours.
(Diploma of Children's Services)*

*To go back to work. To fit in with family commitments. Have to suit children.
(Business Administration, TAFE)*

*Hours in these industries would suit me with children
(Medical Receptionist, Responsible Serving Of Alcohol, Responsible Gaming – 2 providers)*

Comments indicated that a number of respondents were working in a family business and required skills for this work:

*My husband's business required me to do bookwork and update my skills
(Cert 2 in IT plus short course in web design)*

A number were also interested in skills for their own business:

*Husband inspired me to do something for myself and be able to start my own business from home
(Nail Technology, followed by Beauty course)*

*Hoping to do conveyancing from home and set up my own business
(Conveyancing, MYOB, Adobe Creative suite – 3 different providers)*

*Run own business and needed skills to apply to business.
(Adobe photoshop, MYOB and Cert 4 in web design – same provider)*

Suggestions from other people were important to some respondents:

*Looking for work and wanted to be a library assistant. A staff member at the school suggested that I do this course
(Integration Aide and various first aid related programs, ACE provider)*

*Was helping out with my children at school at swimming. As I was doing well the school suggested that I go for my qualifications
(2 swim training for children programs plus a basic computer course, private provider and TAFE)*

*Strongly recommended to me by a career consultant in order to work with training adults
(Typing course, two courses in workplace training and assessment – 2 ACE providers, TAFE).*

A few respondents indicated that they had actively sought information about labour market opportunities before choosing a course:

*Best shot for me getting back into the workforce. Looked through newspapers to see what market demand was
(IT, MYOB, Book-keeping – ACE provider)*

A few also were unhappy with course choices open to them, or disappointed that their chosen course was unavailable. For instance:

*The company only offered me their own courses. They were only promoting themselves
(Excel 1, 2 and 3 – private provider)*

*Courses I chose were cancelled
(IT, Victoria university)*

While others seemed disinterested:

*Was doing nothing and it was free.
(Computer course – ACE)*

Course choice is thus a complex issue, particularly so where grant recipients are able to complete more than one program. There is no suggestion that grant recipients choose a course blindly. On the contrary they appear to make strategic choices taking into account a number of different factors including their existing skills and interests, areas where they believe they are lacking in skills or attributes sought after in the workplace, areas where there is flexibility in employment; and available job opportunities. In making these choices they take advice where they can.

This suggests the problem of a mismatch between course choices and job openings is unlikely to be as problematic as previously indicated. However, there is still room to provide recipients with greater information and career advice to assist them in making appropriate choices for their particular circumstances.

Using grant funding

Among survey respondents, more than half (59%) expended all their grant funding, a quarter expended between \$750 and \$999 and 11% less than \$750. The vast majority (84%) thus expended three quarters or more of their grant (Table 3.10).

Table 3.10: How much of the grant did recipients use in total?

	<i>No</i>	%
Used all of it	166	58.8
Used between \$750 and \$999	70	24.8
Used between \$500 and \$749	14	4.9
Used less than \$500	18	6.3
Don't recall	14	4.9
	282	100

If a higher proportion of recipients had used all of their grant the level of funding would have appeared overall to be insufficient. Similarly, if the proportion of respondents using only a small proportion of the grant had been larger the level of funding would have appeared (in general) to exceed need. As it is, the data suggest that generally speaking (though perhaps not in all individual cases) the grant provides a reasonable level of support.

Respondents in the highest and lowest income bands were those least likely to use all the grant funding. There are no clear reasons for this pattern but it may relate to choice of course and provider and the availability of concessions. Those most likely to use their grant fully had household incomes of between \$60,000 and \$99,000 (Table 3.11).

Table 3.11: Amount of grant used by household income of recipient

<i>Income level</i>	<i>Less than \$20,000</i>	<i>20,000- 39,999</i>	<i>40,000- 59,999</i>	<i>60,000- 79,999</i>	<i>80,000 – 99,999</i>	<i>More than \$100,000</i>	<i>All</i>
Grant used	%	%	%	%	%	%	
All of it	58.9	62.1	61.2	72.2	71.4	59.2	166
\$750-999	21.9	28.3	30.6	11.1	21.4	33.3	70
\$500-749	10.9	5.4	1.6	0.0	0.0	3.7	14
Less than \$500	8.2	4.0	6.4	16.6	7.1	3.7	18
	100	100	100	100	100	100	268

Around 62 percent of survey respondents spent \$800 or more of their grant on course fees. For these individuals, there would have been little left in reserve to assist with childcare or study costs. However, a fifth of respondents (20%) spent less than \$500 on course fees and consequently would have retained half the grant for study and childcare expenses (Table 3.12).

More than a third of survey respondents (37%) expended all of their grant on course fees. Of these, 43 indicated that they had enrolled for only one course. Thus of all the survey respondents approximately 15 percent appeared to use the entire grant to meet the fee for one course. Seven of these enrolled in a university, including four for a bachelor's degree, one for a masters degree and two for a graduate diploma. At least ten had enrolled in TAFE and a similar number with an ACE provider. The largest group had enrolled for a course with a private RTO, including professional associations and community organisations such as St John Ambulance.

Over half of those respondents who used all of their grant funding (56) had enrolled in a second course, and 36 in a further third course. Multiple course enrolments did not favour one particular type of provider, other than that universities were generally excluded (although at least one respondent had completed multiple short courses in a university).

In consultations conducted for this project it was suggested that RTOs were increasingly charging grant recipients the full \$1000 (or close to it) in course fees. When an individual expends all their grant funds on a single course they have no further funds to enrol in a second course, or to provide support with childcare or study expenses. This is not necessarily problematic, but could disadvantage recipients whose first course did not meet their needs and who were thus unable to enrol in a second, or those whose ability to continue in training was adversely affected by childcare or study costs.

Based on responses to the survey, the number and proportion of grant recipients involved is fairly small. Thus there does not yet appear to be cause for concern or for a policy response. However, if the practice of charging the full grant for a single course becomes more widespread or is found to be disadvantaging grant recipients then there would be grounds to re-examine the issue.

Table 3.12: Amount of grant spent on course fees

	No	%
all of it	102	36.9
\$900 and \$999	38	13.7
\$800-899	29	10.5
\$700-799	28	10.1
\$600-699	14	5.0
\$500-599	11	3.9
\$400-499	8	2.9
\$300-399	7	2.5
\$200-299	11	3.9
Less than \$200	28	10.1
All	276	100

Of the 286 survey respondents only 24 (8%) indicated that they used some of the grant funding to meet childcare expenses. This is a very small number, especially given the level of parental responsibilities noted earlier. The average amount spent on childcare was \$244.00, the highest \$800.00.

Three-quarters of these 24 respondents (18) had children under five years of age. Another 70 survey respondents had children of the same age but did not use the grant for childcare – in some cases because they used the financial support provided by the grant for course fees or study resources.

A much larger number of survey respondents (85) used the grant to fund study resources, with the average amount spent (\$253) similar to that for childcare.

Asked how the program might be improved, only a few survey respondents suggested an increase in the level of support provided by the grant:

As I am completing the course by correspondence, \$1000 does not go very far. Increase the grant.

Depending on the course, more could be granted. Some courses are costly and \$1000 would not be enough.

A bit more money as courses are quite expensive. Even another \$500 would make a difference

More money. The courses are so expensive. To do nursing through a private provider is around \$6000

Undoubtedly there will be individual cases where additional assistance would make a difference to grant recipients, for instance they might enable a recipient to enrol in their first preference course – even if it is high cost – and still have some funds left to use for necessary childcare and study resources. However, overall there does not appear to be a particularly strong case for increasing the grant amount.

Course completions and employment outcomes

The overwhelmingly majority of grant recipients completed the courses in which they had enrolled⁵. The completion rate for first courses was 88% and the rate was even higher for second and third courses (Table 3.13).

Table 3.13: Course completions, courses 1, 2 and 3

	<i>Completed</i>		<i>Did not complete</i>		<i>All</i>
	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	
Course one	249	88.3	33	11.7	282
Course two	126	91.3	12	8.7	138
Course three	72	92.3	6	7.6	78
Average		90.6		9.3	

A large majority of survey respondents (200, or 71%) obtained employment after completing the last course for which they used the grant.

Close to half of those gaining employment did so either straight away (44%) or within 3 months (24%). A further 10% obtained employment within 6 months and almost a quarter 23% after six months.

There was a slight decline in the proportion of survey recipients gaining employment ‘straight away’ from 2003-2006 – however, this was made up for by an increase in the proportion gaining employment within three months (Table 3.14).

Table 3.14: Of those who gained employment – how long did it take them, by year grant awarded?

<i>Length of time to gain employment</i>	<i>2003</i>		<i>2004</i>		<i>2005</i>	
	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
straight away	23	46.0	41	45.5	21	41.1
within three months	8	16.0	20	22.2	14	27.4
within six months	6	12.0	8	8.8	6	11.7
after six months	13	26.0	21	23.3	10	19.6
All	50	100	90	100	51	100

Of those survey respondents who obtained employment 82 percent did so in an area of work that was either indirectly or directly related to the course/s they had completed (Table 3.15). This highlights the value of the education and training they completed through the grant in assisting them to return to work.

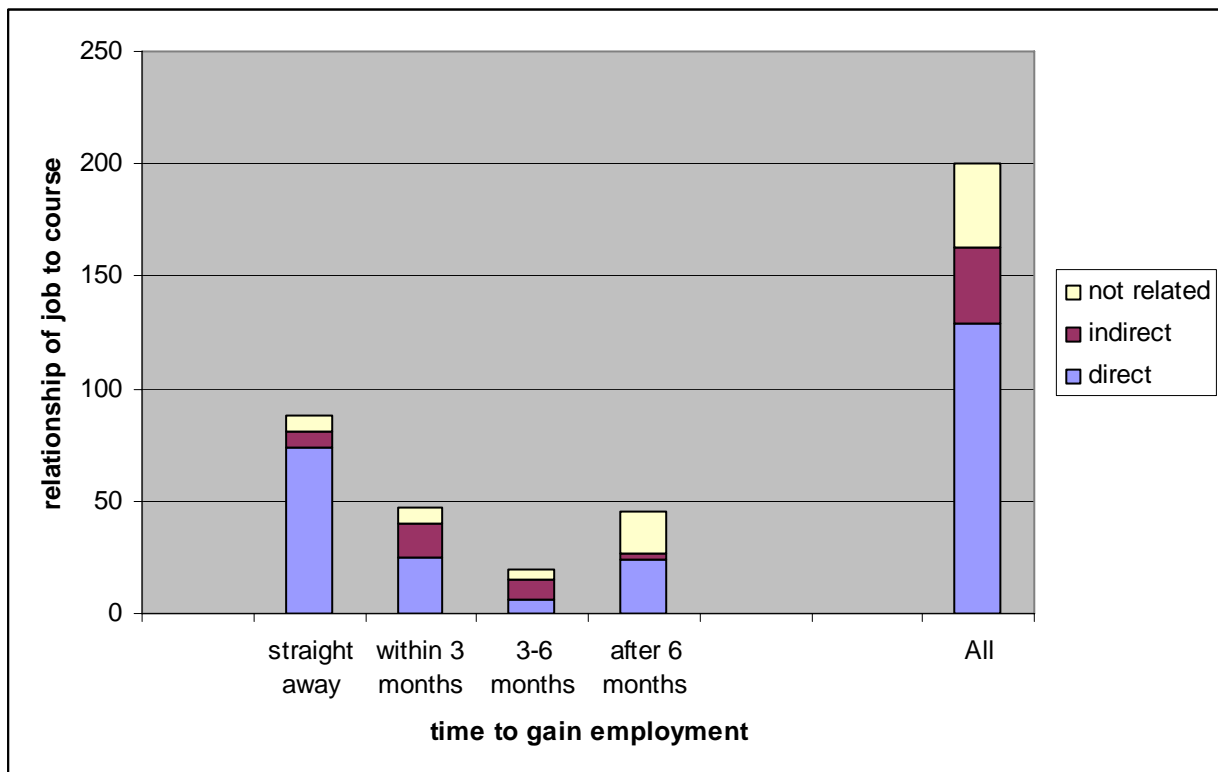
⁵ In calculating completion rates it must be remembered that a very small number of grant recipients enrol in programs which extend beyond 12 months – eg a bachelor’s degree program.

Table 3.15: What kind of work did they get?

	No	%
Directly related to the course/s	129	64.5
Indirectly related to the course/s	34	17
Or not related to the course/s	37	18.5
All	200	100

While the proportion of survey respondents who obtained employment that was not related to their course was small, this proportion was highest among those taking more than six months to gain employment (Figure 5). Earlier intervention might improve these figures and outcomes for individuals – such as assistance with course choice, or job-seeking, or both. Comments made by survey respondents highlighted the need for both.

Figure 3.1: Time to gain employment by relationship of employment to course



A slightly higher proportion of those taking longer than six months to obtain employment than all employed survey respondents had undertaken a non-certificated course for their first course (40% compared with 34%) and there was an even greater difference between these survey respondents and those gaining employment ‘straight away’ (22%). There was also a substantial difference in the proportions whose first course was at certificate 3 level. A third of those gaining employment straight away had undertaken a first course at this level compared with only 18% of those obtaining employment after six months and 22% of all respondents (Table 23).

Encouragement to grant recipients to undertake at least one certificated course might thus also have a positive influence on employment outcomes.

No relationship was apparent between the industry area of the courses chosen by grant recipients and the time taken to gain employment. Among grant recipients taking courses in the same or similar industry areas there were variations in the time taken to gain employment, which indicate factors at work other than course content. However, among those respondents who indicated that they had gained employment straight away (87 respondents) there were some small groups of respondents who had taken similar courses. Ten persons (11% of this group) had taken at least one course in aged care; another nine had taken a business course and a slightly smaller group (7 persons) had trained as an integration aide. The data thus suggest that study in these areas might lead to earlier employment opportunities.

Table 3.16: First course level, respondents taking more than 6 months to gain employment, respondents gaining employment ‘straight away’ and all respondents

	<i>Respondents taking more than 6 months to gain employment %</i>	<i>Respondents gaining employment straight away</i>	<i>All respondents %</i>
Non certificated	40.0	21.5	33.9
Certificate 1	11.1	12.5	13.0
Certificate 2	11.1	6.8	10.6
Certificate 3	17.7	32.9	21.9
Certificate 4	11.1	13.6	10.9
Diploma	6.6	9.0	7.0
Degree	2.2	3.4	2.4
	100	100	100

A question that arose in consultations for the project was whether grant recipients managed to gain ‘real jobs’, understood to mean jobs requiring skills, offering secure employment and possibly also a career path, after they had completed their study. Within the limitations of the survey insufficient data was gained to answer this question comprehensively. However, responses to several questions do provide some useful indications. Already it has been noted that most respondents gained employment after completing their last grant-funded course and in the majority of cases this employment was directly or indirectly related to their course/s. Responses to two further questions are pertinent.

Firstly respondents were asked whether the employment they obtained was full-time, part-time or casual. While these three options are not mutually exclusive, the aim was to gain a general indication of their type of employment. No difficulties were reported in answering this question. Secondly, respondents were also asked to indicate the number of hours per week that they ‘normally work’.

Only 24 respondents (12% of all respondents who obtained employment after completing their last grant-funded course) indicated that they had gained full-time employment. Of this group, half had gained employment ‘straight away’ after completing their last grant-funded course and for 75 % of them this employment was directly related to their course/s. (Two thirds had completed a certificated program for their first course and 30 percent had undertaken a Certificate 3 level program.) At the time they received the grant a large proportion (71%) of this group were in the two lowest household income bands and almost a quarter of them were single parents. Thus for this group the PRTW grant appeared to have had made a significant difference to their lives.

A much larger group (82 persons, 41%) indicated part-time employment and an even larger group (94 persons, 47%) indicated casual employment.

Overall, the average number of hours worked per week was 20 hours, with a small group of respondents (31 persons) indicating employment of 10 hours per week or less.

The data raise a number of issues. First, had a larger proportion of survey respondents sought full-time work but been unable to obtain it and thus settled for part-time or casual work? This appears unlikely. Very few respondents indicating part-time or casual employment also indicated that they worked 35 or more hours per week – indicative of taking on more than one job with shorter hours in

order to make up a full-time load (8 persons). In addition, comments made by survey respondents in answer to open-ended questions highlight the importance to them of flexible employment able to be combined with their ongoing family commitments. Thus, a preference for family-friendly work appears to be behind respondents' part-time or casual employment, rather than a lack of opportunities or success in winning full-time employment.

Secondly, would those who gained employment for only a few hours per week have preferred longer hours; and are their skills and talents being underutilised? Among the 31 respondents who indicated that they were working only 10 hours a week or less there is evidence of some difficulty in obtaining suitable employment in that a much larger proportion of this group (42%) than all employed survey respondents (23%) had taken longer than six months to gain employment and a larger proportion of this group (23% compared with 19%) had also gained employment that was not related to their course. Comments by survey respondents in answer to open-ended questions indicate that many saw a need for additional support in obtaining employment. This group in particular may benefit from such support.

Given the qualifications of these respondents there does also appear to be some under-utilisation of their skills. Almost three quarters (72%) had completed a certificated program, the majority at Certificate 3 level or higher. Assistance with gaining suitable employment would also help to address this issue.

Thirdly, what are the reasons some respondents have not obtained employment and do they require assistance? Of the 82 respondents who indicated that they had not obtained employment after completing their last course, just over a quarter (24 persons) had not looked for work, for reasons including that they were continuing to study, they were setting-up their own business or had become pregnant. For this group, assistance in finding employment does not appear to be required

A larger group (39 persons) were still looking for work. However, the vast majority (87%) were confident that they would obtain it in the next three to six months. Nearly a quarter of them (9 persons) wished they had done a different course/s and a further five were 'a little dissatisfied' with the course/s they had chosen. Respondents' answers to open ended questions point to a need for greater information about courses available and for improved support with choosing a course. This type of support might be of particular assistance to this group.

While the number of discouraged job seekers among the survey respondents is very low (fewer than 20 respondents had been unsuccessful in seeking work and had given up looking) for the individuals involved participation in the PRTW program has not met expectations. Improved assistance with obtaining employment will help to minimise such instances.

Improving the program

Survey respondents were asked to comment on how the PRTW program might be improved. Some respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the program as it was and could see no reason for change. For example:

Very good the way it was.

The program is wonderful.

Overall very happy with the program. Was able to obtain all the information that I required and was always able to contact staff.

However, the vast majority offered at least one suggestion for improvement. Their comments fall into four main subject groups:

1. Marketing of the program

Respondents were concerned that many potential applicants did not hear about the program. Typical of these comments were:

Needs more advertising. More people should know about the program.

More advertising required and more exposure to the public.

Be a little more marketed. People I had spoken to did not know about the program.

Some respondents gave specific ideas for improving the distribution of program information, with most nominating local/community sources. For instance:

Needs more advertising. Through school newsletters and notice boards.

More advertising in local community centres

More publicity required through schools and community centres.

2. The quality of information about the program

Respondents were also concerned about the quality of the information they were given about the program. For instance:

Was disappointed when I spoke to Centrelink and they gave me misleading information.

Sources that they expected to be authoritative were sometimes disappointing:

TAFE were not familiar with the program and I had trouble accessing the grant there.

Had trouble finding information. Even TAFE where I enquired did not know much. Manager came out and looked up on computer and said I was eligible.

One specifically mentioned a difficulty with the telephone hotline:

Very hard to get through on the telephone. Kept going to message bank, but they did eventually get back to me

Finding out about which courses they could use the grant for appeared to be a particular difficulty:

Just a little more information given out. I did not realise that I could have used the grant to go to university for a course

Several respondents appeared unaware that they could trace how they had spent their grant and check their grant balance. For instance:

Need feedback and to know where the money has gone to. Had no idea of costs

Lack of information. Completed computer course and then went to TAFE only to find that the grant had all been used up and I was not allowed to apply again.

3. Greater assistance with career planning and course choice.

Many respondents indicated that they would have liked greater assistance when they received the grant with planning a career and choosing the best course/s to achieve their goals.

Advice on what courses to do for the type of employment that I wanted would have been helpful. Found that at the end of the course that it did not benefit.

People need to have knowledge of what careers are out there and what steps the parents have to follow to get to that career. A single mum would be terrified if she had been out of the workforce for 5 or 6 years (eg Computers)

A bit more guidance with what to do. Need to look at all your options before choosing the courses. Look into it more to see what qualifications you want.

Sadly, some indicated that without such support – and with inadequate information – they had made wrong choices.

4. Greater assistance with finding employment.

Similarly, many respondents also indicated that they would have liked greater support once they had completed their course/s with finding employment. Typical of these comments was:

We need emotional support and we need more individual case workers. We need people to look at our resumes and skills and devise a program to get back into work, to find a mentor or to organise some volunteer or work placement

No help regarding job placements or job opportunities. After 2 years and no job, I would like another grant to learn more skills to get a job

Several suggested work placements as a part of their courses, such as

Transition from course to work; perhaps a work placement or work experience could be offered.

This respondent sought an ongoing relationship with the course provider:

Once you have done the course they do not offer any extra services like preparing a resume or posting you on their books. Provide the disks for the programs for you to use at home so you can maintain what you have learnt.

In addition to these were comments by small numbers of respondents (fewer than 10) on some other aspects of program arrangements. Some were disappointed that their preferred course/s had been cancelled and others that they had tried to enrol in a program offered by a provider which did not accept the grant. Some indicated that they found the choice of courses open to them was too narrow.

The extension of the grant beyond twelve months to enable them to undertake further study (especially when grant funds remained unexpended) was an issue taken up by several respondents. Others suggested that those who had received a grant once should be able to apply again. As indicated earlier, some respondents found that the grant was too small and they had insufficient funds to cover all their costs. A handful thought that eligibility requirements could be widened.

Respondents were asked if they had any further comments about the program. Many used this opportunity to praise the program and argue for its continuation. Their comments underscored the high value that the majority placed on the program due to the significant outcomes they had achieved through it:

Thrilled to be part of the program which led to a university degree. Gave me confidence.

Great for stay at home Mums. Update skills so employers know you are serious about returning to work. I am more confident in returning to work as a result of completing the courses.

Was fantastic. Encourages people back into the workforce. Shows that the government is willing to help people back into the workforce.

It is wonderful. After 10 years at home, I stepped out of my comfort zone and was able to contribute to the community with confidence.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Drawing on the data analysis, consultations and survey of grant recipients, this section addresses the following key issues:

1. Is the program meeting its objectives?
2. Is the program being marketed effectively?
3. Is the program being administered effectively?
4. What benefits do individuals receiving a grant derive from their participation in the program and how might these benefits be increased?

Each section summarises the main findings identified in sections 1-3, points to areas where improvements are possible and makes recommendations for achieving them.

Is the program meeting its objectives?

The aim of the PRTW program is to assist parents to prepare to return to work after being at home caring for their children. The data collected for this evaluation indicates that the program has been highly successful in achieving this objective.

Since the program began, over 8000 parents have been assisted. Based on data from a sample survey of grant recipients the overwhelming majority (88%) complete at least one course, with about half going on to a second course and a quarter to a third course, with an even greater rate of success. A large majority of grant recipients (71%) obtain employment after completing their last course, two-thirds of them within three months. Most of those who gain employment do so in an area of work directly or indirectly related to the course/s they complete (82%). Most (87%) of those seeking employment are confident that they will be successful in the next three-six months.

The evidence also suggests that but for the program a large group parents would not engage in study. The survey found that nearly 48% of grant recipients would not have enrolled in their first course but for the grant and this proportion rises to 61% for a second and 70 % for a third course. The proportion of single parents among grant recipients (24%) is considerably higher than among the general population (20% in Victoria). At the time they received the grant, the majority of grant recipients lived in a household with a pre-tax income below average weekly earnings for adults, 30% in a household with an annual incomes of less than \$20,000.

In consultations providers also stated that the grant positively influences the decision of parents to enrol. For instance, TAFE institutes gave examples of students who had enrolled in a course, but who had subsequently withdrawn when they missed out on a grant, due to the costs involved in study. One ACE provider also noted that there was no alternative form of government support for parents seeking to return to work whose partners were in employment.

Areas for improvement

An area where improvements are possible is in the allocation of grants. Firstly, the current allocation system results in a skewed distribution which advantages some regions and recipients at the expense of others. The distribution of grants seems to be only weakly linked to measures of need. Several LGAs which rank low on the SEIFA index have received high levels of grants but

there are others that have received very few grants. And while there are some small LGAs that receive a relatively high number of grants, in general it appears that smaller regional LGAs do not fare well in the allocation.

Recommendation 1

To more closely align the grant with measures of need some criteria on need should be included in the allocation process. It may be that say 70% of grants could be allocated on the current basis. The remaining 30% of grants could be allocated to LGAs or to clusters of LGAs according to demographic features of the LGAs and the value of the SEIFA Index of disadvantage.

Secondly, the current process for allocating PRTW grants does not take into account where skills shortages are—nor the types of skills required in these areas. Since the program aims to assist parents to return to work a closer alignment between distribution of the grants and identified skills shortage areas might enhance employment outcomes—while also addressing local difficulties that arise from shortages.

As discussed in section 1, The Department of Victorian Communities (DVC) analysed skills shortages in 11 regions of the state (Regional Skills Shortage Survey Project - <http://www.employment.vic.gov.au/web10/dvcep.nsf/allDocs/RWP349C1F7313A06A42CA2571680010B825?OpenDocument>). Through interviews with employers, the DVC sought to collect a range of information relating to recruitment difficulties, skills in demand, and unfilled vacancies by major industry including the occupations where vacancies were the most difficult to fill.

Based on such information it would be possible to give greater weight to skills shortages in the grant allocation process. However, there are a number of reasons that such action should not become a major part of the process:

- The vast majority of grant recipients already obtain employment, most of them in areas related to their grant-funded study. A closer alignment between grants and job vacancies might assist in a few individual cases, but overall appears unnecessary.
- Grant recipients express a strong preference for work in industries and occupations which are ‘family-friendly’, i.e. offer flexible working conditions enabling work to be combined with family responsibilities. These industries and occupations may not necessarily be those where skills shortages have been identified.
- There are several dimensions to the reported skill needs and the information does not have unambiguous meaning for a job seeker. It would be an extremely complex activity and probably one without net benefit to try to include such information in the process of allocation of grants, though it might be used to a minor degree in the allocation of grants by region. Skill shortage information is best provided to job seekers by skilled careers advisers and used to assist in their job and training choices.

Is the program being marketed effectively?

Demand for PRTW grants continually exceeds supply. Consequently there has been no pressure on the program administrator, nor providers, to market the program extensively.

The program administrator prepares, publishes and distributes information about the program in print and on the internet. Some providers advertise the grant locally (e.g. in their course guides and

local press) and hand out the material prepared by the administrator in response to queries and requests for further information. Consultations revealed that they were happy with these arrangements. A small number of providers, especially those which have developed courses specifically for the target group, engage in more active marketing using innovative methods such as a booth at a shopping centre.

Survey respondents indicated that they gained information about the program from a number of different sources, the most common being an adult education centre, a friend or relative or a course provider. The vast majority found the information they obtained to be useful or very useful. They also indicated that they preferred to gain information through personal contact rather than through the internet.

Areas for improvement

A concern indicated by the comments of survey respondents and providers is that parents who are eligible to apply for the grant may miss out on information about it, due to the way in which information about the program is currently distributed. This view seems to be supported by the skewed distribution of grants across LGAs, which suggests information reaches eligible parents in some regions more readily than in others.

Survey respondents suggested that greater use could be made for instance, of local/community information channels such as newsletters and notice boards of schools and community centres. Local governments and providers might also have an interest in increasing the local share of grants and thus be encouraged to take a stronger role in disseminating grant information.

Recommendation 2

A more targeted marketing strategy be developed with the specific aim of increasing the number of grant recipients in regions where they are currently under-represented.

Is the program being administered effectively?

The program administrator maintains the administrative systems that underpin the operation of the grant program. Overall, these appear to work well. In consultations, providers were in general highly supportive of most current arrangements and comments by survey respondents express similar views. Only minor issues and concerns were raised.

The program administrator contributes substantially to the ongoing smooth operation of the program by supporting providers registered for the program and grant recipients. Activities include preparing and distributing an information pack about the program to new grant recipients, maintaining the program website and providing advice to providers, grant applicants and grant recipients as required.

The program administrator also contributes to an understanding of the scope and outcomes of the program by maintaining program records, collecting program data and preparing regular reports for DIIRD on the number of grants issued, the number and total of claims processed, the age and gender of grant recipients, the number of grants for each LGA, each provider and each provider type. The program administrator also sends an exit survey to grant recipients one month before expiry of their grant. This asks if employment has been obtained and collects comments on the program.

Providers maintain regular contact with the program administrator, with contact peaking around the times grants are released. In consultations providers report that staff of the program administrator have been responsive, helpful, and capable of addressing problems and issues.

Providers manage the expectations of applicants and administer applications and claims. The majority accept applications in the order in which individuals apply, using a 'first come, first served' approach that mirrors the overall grant distribution process used by the program administrator. One or two make minor adjustments to the order of applications, based on their own assessment of needs, e.g. giving priority to those most unable to meet course fees.

In order to maximise their success in securing grants for applicants submitting through them, some providers have directed additional resources to the submission of applications on the day that grants are released.

Providers have also contributed to the program's success by:

- Developing and introducing courses specifically designed for parents seeking to return to work (private rtos)
- Expanding the number of places in courses that they were already delivering to accommodate the extra numbers applying for places as a result of the PRTW program
- Introducing higher level certificates that offer increased vocational outcomes
- Combining training and employment services for parents
- Offering advice to grant recipients about how much grant funding they have left, and how best to use it.

Areas for improvement

Consultations with providers revealed that competition between them to secure grants for those parents applying through them has increased as the number of providers registered for the program has increased and knowledge of the program has grown among potential applicants.

As a result, some providers now work to secure as many grants as possible by directing additional staff resources to the speedy submission of applications on the day that grants are released. They indicated that this practice has tended to reduce the time taken to allocate all the grants available.

A further effect of this practice is that parents applying through these providers have a much greater chance of securing a grant than those applying elsewhere. This is inequitable and may contribute to the skewed distribution of grants across LGAs.

The costs involved in applying additional resources, or in re-directing existing resources, were among the reasons given by some of the providers interviewed for a grant allocation method based on quotas - a set number or proportion of grants in each round given directly to providers to allocate to applicants as they see fit over a set period – including to re-allocate if the recipient does not activate the grant. Another reason was the uncertainty of the grant application process and the extent to which it is locked in to specific dates. Providers would like to be able to offer greater certainty to applicants about the likely success of their application, which they could do if they had greater control of the process.

Recommendation 3

Consideration be given to the allocation of a proportion of grants directly to providers through a quota system. Investigations should consider: what proportion of total grants should be directly allocated to providers; and the basis for calculating quotas, e.g. the pattern of grant distribution over recent years and/or some form geographic and socio-economic indicators. The potential impact of a partial quota allocation system on the equitable distribution of grants according to need and geographic location should also be considered.

Providers commented that the PRTW telephone 'hotline' service (1300 service) is often busy and if they want to contact the program administrator with queries they must wait or use other means. The hotline appears to be a high traffic service - the program administrator advised that on average, the service takes 1100 calls per month – about 37 per day. Unanswered calls are diverted to an answering system and calls returned but it is not always possible to contact callers.

Recommendation 4

Providers be instructed to use a direct line to contact the program administrator rather than the 1300 service, to reduce pressure on this service and leave it free for the use of grant applicants and recipients. If the program administrator indicates that they are required, additional resources be provided to staff this direct line and to expand the hotline service to ensure that the proportion of calls being diverted to the answering service is low.

Comments from survey respondents revealed several instances of grant applicants and recipients being given incorrect information about the program, including about providers and courses available and how the grant could be used. Two surprising sources of incorrect information were TAFE institutes and Centrelink. Thus it appears that there is some confusion about the program even within organisations which provide advice to applicants and recipients and thus should be better informed.

Recommendation 5

Existing information about the program provided to stakeholder organisations be reviewed to determine if revisions are required to increase clarity and reduce misunderstandings. Current procedures for distributing updated information be reviewed to ensure that they are effective in ensuring the material reaches all stakeholder organisations in a timely fashion.

Providers reported that the process of submitting applications was unnecessarily complicated because the online application form does not mirror the paper application form which each applicant must fill in. This caused some confusion and delays in submitting the required information.

Recommendation 6

That the online and paper application forms be aligned.

Providers also reported that they were not always certain about which study-related expenses could be claimed against the grant and needed to seek advice from the program administrator.

Recommendation 7

Clear guidelines on what can and cannot be claimed be prepared by the program administrator and distributed to providers.

The extent to which the program and its outcomes are monitored was an issue raised in consultations with both providers and DIIRD. Providers sought more information about the impact of their participation in the program, including student destinations, while longer-term outcomes for grant recipients particularly in relation to employment were mentioned by DIIRD.

Recommendation 8

The existing data collection system be expanded to enable a closer monitoring of the program and its impacts, with an emphasis on providing improved evidence of program outcomes and the early signalling of any potential problems – such as a skewed allocation of grants, or local difficulties for grant recipients in gaining employment. This could include:

- Where recipients gain program information
- Previous education attainment of grant recipients
- Longer-term employment outcomes of grant-funded study.
- Other post-study destinations (e.g. further study).

4. Enhancing benefits to grant recipients

In addition, to employment, grant recipients benefit from the PRTW program in several other ways. Comments by survey respondents highlighted:

- *Enhancing skills* – respondents indicated that after being out of the workforce for some time they believed the skills they had were no longer current or adequate. The grant enabled them to take courses which helped them to update their skills, learn new skills and regain lost skills.
- *Gaining confidence* – respondents commented that through their grant-funded study they had gained in confidence and self-esteem. This had enabled them to take on a new range of activities, such as employment, starting their own business and re-engaging with the communities they lived in.
- *Further study* – having completed their grant-funded study respondents are able to go on to further study.

Areas for improvement

In comments for the survey, grant recipients indicated that further information about jobs, careers and courses would help them in making decisions about careers and study. While in some cases providers had offered advice more was sought. In addition, there was some doubt among a few survey respondents that providers were always able to offer objective advice, due to their interest in securing enrolments.

The provision of advice to grant recipients about job opportunities in their local area, and associated training requirements and opportunities, could also serve to draw skill shortages to their attention, as well as assist them to make appropriate choices.

Recommendation 9

Methods be explored for providing grant recipients with additional information advice and guidance to assist them in selecting a career and course, including information about job opportunities and associated training requirements and opportunities in their local area.

As indicated by the survey, a small proportion of grant recipients (15%) take longer than six months to gain employment. A larger proportion of these than other recipients gain employment that is not related to the course/s they have completed, are employed casually and for ten hours a week or less. For this group, employment outcomes thus appear less than ideal.

There is also a very small group of grant recipients (7%) who seek employment but are unsuccessful and give up looking for work.

Both groups would benefit from additional guidance in choosing a course that will lead to employment and assistance with obtaining suitable employment.

Recommendation 10

The information that new grant recipients are given when they are awarded a grant be revised to include information about services available to assist them to gain employment after they have finished their study.

Respondents' comments on the survey identified a need for 'people to look at our resumes and skills and devise a program to get back into work'. Several specifically mentioned they that would have liked 'job placements' or 'work experience' as part of their study and others identified a need for employment services, such as assistance with preparing and submitting a resume.

Recommendation 11

Providers registered for the program be encouraged to incorporate work experience and employment preparation within the programs they offer, especially programs developed specifically for parents seeking to return to work.

Appendix 1: providers consulted for the project

Provider Type	Provider Name	Location	Grants issued	Claims processed
TAFE provider	Gordon Institute TAFE	Geelong	110	1031
TAFE provider	Kangan Batman TAFE	Broadmeadows	148	759
TAFE provider	Chisholm Institute of TAFE	Dandenong	722	4558
ACE provider	Geelong Adult Training & Education	Geelong	48	173
ACE provider	Werribee Neighbourhood House	Werribee	105	338
ACE provider	Cranbourne Community House	Cranbourne	7	6
Private RTO	Australian Academy of Hairdressing	Melbourne	238	407
Private RTO	Bendigo Sports & Entertainment Group	Bendigo	68	86
Private RTO	CSM Group	Port Phillip	302	301
Private RTO	New Futures Training (VICSEG)	Moreland	566	1234

List of interviews:

1	Terry Gordon	Kangan TAFE
2	Helen Simester	Chisholm TAFE
3	Ron Mantell	Chisholm TAFE
4	Janine Bennett	Gordon TAFE
5	Jenny Wapling	Gordon TAFE
6	Jan Wright	Gordon TAFE
7	Christine Stojanski	Gordon TAFE
8	Sue Grayson	Gordon TAFE
9	Maryanne Renee	Gordon TAFE
10	Frank Kennedy	Geelong Adult Training & Education
11	Jacquie Malloch	Geelong Adult Training & Education
12	Pauline Zurek	Werribee Community Centre
13	Pauline Anderson	Werribee Community Centre
14	Cherie Planke	Cranbourne Community House
15	Maree Raftis	VICSEG
16	Amanda Vlasopolous	Pollin8 (formerly CSM)
17	Lisa Pitts	Australian Academy of Hairdressing
18	Greg Brown	Bendigo Sports and Entertainment Group
19	Ana Frilay	Bendigo Sports and Entertainment Group

Appendix 2: interview schedule, providers

Parents Returning to Work Evaluation

Questions for providers

1. What does this program cost you as a provider?
2. What benefit does this program deliver to you as a provider?
3. Would the courses that these students enrol in be filled even if this program was not available?
4. Do you charge any fees for the administrative time required? How are these charged?
5. How do eligible parents find out about the program? (Do you collect data on this?)
6. Would some eligible parents miss out on finding out about the program?
7. Can you provide examples of how your organization has marketed the program?
8. To your knowledge has PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR also marketed the program? If “yes”, to what extent do you think their marketing has been effective?
9. Is the process of verifying grant eligibility adequate?
10. Is the online issuing of grants the best method of allocation, or would you prefer alternative approaches? How easy is the on-line system for your staff to use?
11. What is the estimated ratio of program clients with fee reduction compared to full fee paying students?
12. Why is the level of partially unspent grants relatively high? (What proportion of your clients fully expend their grant?)
13. Does the structure of the program tend to encourage the provider to enrol students in particular types of programs?
14. What factors influence the parent’s choice of course / program?
15. Are particular courses designed or developed to specifically meet the needs of this client group within this training provider?
16. How do the courses in which participants enrol relate to labour market opportunities and industry priority areas?

17. How easy / difficult has it been dealing with PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR? (What view do they have of PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR administration of the program?)
18. What is the extent of unmet demand? (i.e. how many more clients could they process if grants were available?)
19. Outcomes
What is the rate of course completions of your group of students (compared to course enrolments)
20. Outcomes
Does the institution track outcomes for this client group (and if so over what period)?
21. Outcomes
Can you suggest a comparable group whose outcomes could be compared with the participants of this program? How would the outcomes of this “other group” compare with the outcomes of the course participants?
22. Who is responsible for entering your data for grant application, the claims and the grants reports onto the PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR system (and could it be considered reliable?)
23. To what extent do you think that this program influences the outcomes achieved by parents trying to return to the workforce?
24. Do you have any suggestions for improving the program?

Version:

3.30m

24 October 2006

Appendix 3: Survey script

PRWP GRANT SURVEY

STUDENT IDENTIFIER

QUESTION 1

May I ask you what year you received the grant in?

QUESTION 2

And which of the following five age groups were you in when you received the grant?

Were you

18 to 24	
25 to 34	
35 to 44	
45 to 54	
54 Plus	

DO NOT OFFER AS AN OPTION

Refused to answer

QUESTION 3

And which local government or council area were you living in when you received the grant?

*** If respondent does not know name of council ask for town or suburb instead ***

QUESTION 4

Did you have any children under the age of 15 living with you when you received the grant?

YES

NO

Go to Q5

How many were aged 0 to 4 years of age?

How many were aged 5 to 10 years of age?

How many were aged 11 to 14 years of age?

QUESTION 5

Did you have a partner or spouse living with you when you received the grant?

YES

NO

QUESTION 6

From the following seven options, may I ask what your total household income before tax was when you received the grant?

Was it	Less than \$20,000	
	Between \$20,000 and \$39,999	
	Between \$40,000 and \$59,999	
	Between \$60,000 and \$79,999	
	Between \$80,000 and \$99,999	
	Between \$100,000 and \$140,000	
	Or more than \$140,000	
***	DO NOT OFFER AS AN OPTION	Refused to answer

QUESTION 7

From the following six options, can you tell me where you first heard about the Parents Returning to Work Program?

Was it at	A TAFE institute	
	An adult education centre	
	From a counsellor	
	From a friend or relative	
	From the internet	ASK FOR WEBSITE(S)
Or	Other	ASK FOR EXPLANATION

QUESTION 8

Did you get information from anywhere else?

YES
ASK FOR EXPLANATION

NO
GO TO Q9

QUESTION 9

From the following four options, can you tell me how useful the information was that you received?

Would you say that it was

Very useful	
A little useful	
Not very useful	
Or Inadequate	

QUESTION 10

Can you tell me the name of the TAFE, Adult Education Centre or private training provider that you applied for the grant at?

QUESTION 11A

And can you tell me the name of the course or courses that you used the grant for?

COURSE 1 _____

COURSE 2 _____

COURSE 3 _____

QUESTION 11B

And can you tell me who the provider of that course or courses was?

COURSE 1 _____

COURSE 2 _____

COURSE 3 _____

QUESTION 11C

And from the following seven options, can you tell me what level the course or courses was?

		COURSE ONE	COURSE TWO	COURSE THREE
Was it	Non certificated			
	Certificate 1			
	Certificate 2			
	Certificate 3			
	Certificate 4			
	Diploma			
	Degree			

QUESTION 12

Can you tell me why you chose this course or courses ?

QUESTION 13

And would you still have enrolled in that course or courses if you did not receive the grant?

COURSE ONE	YES	NO
COURSE TWO	YES	NO
COURSE THREE	YES	NO

QUESTION 14

From the following five options, can you tell me how much of the \$1000 grant you used in total?

Did you	Use all of it	
	Used between \$750 and \$999	
	Used between \$500 and \$749	
	Used less than \$500	
	Don't recall	
***	DO NOT OFFER AS AN OPTION	Refused to answer

QUESTION 15

Thinking about how you spent the grant, can you tell me approximately how much you spent for each of the following three items?

Course Fees	\$
Child Care	\$
Study Resources	\$
Don't Recall	

*** DO NOT OFFER AS AN OPTION Refused to answer

QUESTION 16

From the following five options, can you tell me how satisfied you were overall with the course or courses that you chose?

Would you say you were

Very Satisfied	
Satisfied	
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	
A Little dissatisfied	

Or did you wish you had done something else? ASK FOR EXPLANATION

QUESTION 17

Did you complete the course?

COURSE ONE	YES	NO
COURSE TWO	YES	NO
COURSE THREE	YES	NO

QUESTION 18

Did you obtain employment after the course? (In the case of multiple courses, after the LAST course that you did)

YES

You have stated that you did obtain employment after the course. From the following four options can you tell me how long it took to obtain employment after the course?

Was it

Straight Away	
Within 3 months	
Within 6 months	
After 6 months	

NO

You have stated that you did not obtain employment after the course. Can you tell me which one of the following three statements best suits your position?

Would you say

I did not look for work (GO TO Q19)	
I looked for work but was unsuccessful and I am not looking now (GO TO Q19)	
I am still looking for work	

And from the following three statements, can you tell me which one best matches with how your employment was related to the course or courses? Would you say your employment was

Directly related to the course/s	
Indirectly related to the course/s	
Or not related to the course/s	

As you are still looking for work, from the following four options, how confident are you of obtaining employment within the next 3 to 6 months?

Are you

Very Confident	
Somewhat confident	
A Little Confident	
Not Confident At All	

And from the following three options can you tell me what your type of employment is

Is it	Full Time	
	Part Time	
Or is it	Casual	

And how many hours per week do you normally work?

QUESTION 19

In your own words, can you tell me in what ways you think the Parents Returning to Work program could be improved?

QUESTION 20

Do you have any other comments about the Parents Returning to Work Program?

Appendix 4 Total grants to March 2006 by LGA and selected characteristics

	LGA		No. of grants	% of grants	Population 2001	Grants per 1000 population	No of Families with children under 15	Grants per 1000 families with children under 15	SEIFA Index of Disadvantage
22830	Greater Shepparton City I	regional	411	5.5%	55210	7.44	6577	62.5	977
21750	Colac-Otway Shire Council	regional	69	0.9%	20089	3.43	2177	31.7	1003
24600	Melbourne City Council	metropolitan	50	0.7%	67786	0.74	1947	25.7	1038
23270	Hume City Council	metropolitan	423	5.7%	131585	3.21	17746	23.8	954
24650	Melton Shire Council	metropolitan	168	2.3%	51824	3.24	7124	23.6	997
21610	Casey City Council	metropolitan	567	7.6%	176075	3.22	24511	23.1	994
21450	Cardinia Shire Council	metropolitan	134	1.8%	45404	2.95	5920	22.6	1019
21950	Delatite (from 2002 Benalla and Mansfield)	regional	46	0.6%	21833	2.11	2117	21.7	1002
22670	Greater Dandenong City I	metropolitan	279	3.8%	124536	2.24	13282	21.0	877
27260	Wyndham City Council	metropolitan	240	3.2%	85179	2.82	11490	20.9	1008
26700	Wangaratta Rural City I	regional	56	0.8%	25668	2.18	2769	20.2	994
20910	Bayside City Council	metropolitan	176	2.4%	84097	2.09	8873	19.8	1108
22170	Frankston City Council	metropolitan	254	3.4%	110179	2.31	13043	19.5	993
25250	Moreland City Council	metropolitan	233	3.1%	131359	1.77	12135	19.2	985
22110	East Gippsland Shire I	regional	69	0.9%	38028	1.81	3855	17.9	984
22750	Greater Geelong City I	regional	351	4.7%	184331	1.90	19959	17.6	993
21370	Campaspe Shire Council	regional	63	0.8%	34610	1.82	3850	16.4	1002
25060	Moonee Valley City Council	metropolitan	167	2.2%	106116	1.57	10315	16.2	1016
25340	Mornington Peninsula Shire I	metropolitan	218	2.9%	125378	1.74	13487	16.2	1028
24330	Maribyrnong City Council	metropolitan	87	1.2%	59770	1.46	5615	15.5	915
26810	Wellington Shire Council	regional	68	0.9%	39287	1.73	4405	15.4	1006
21890	Darebin City Council	metropolitan	175	2.4%	123848	1.41	11490	15.2	967
21830	Corangamite Shire Council	regional	27	0.4%	16673	1.62	1839	14.7	1025
24900	Moir Shire Council	regional	40	0.5%	25475	1.57	2732	14.6	996
24210	Manningham City Council	metropolitan	158	2.1%	107920	1.46	10837	14.6	1087
27450	Yarra Ranges Shire Council	metropolitan	241	3.2%	137539	1.75	16829	14.3	1037
26980	Whitehorse City Council	metropolitan	193	2.6%	140751	1.37	13710	14.1	1068
27170	Wodonga Rural City Council	regional	54	0.7%	31010	1.74	3854	14.0	982
23810	Latrobe City Council	regional	112	1.5%	67022	1.67	8043	13.9	960
23940	Loddon Shire Council	regional	11	0.1%	8197	1.34	803	13.7	996
25150	Moorabool Shire Council	regional	42	0.6%	23877	1.76	3078	13.6	1017
21180	Brimbank City Council	metropolitan	262	3.5%	163474	1.60	19616	13.4	919
25900	Port Phillip City Council	metropolitan	59	0.8%	80157	0.74	4418	13.4	1079
23670	Knox City Council	metropolitan	212	2.9%	141912	1.49	17446	12.2	1041
22620	Greater Bendigo City	regional	116	1.6%	86066	1.35	9820	11.8	990
27350	Yarra City Council	metropolitan	52	0.7%	68018	0.76	4425	11.8	1014
20660	Banyule City Council	metropolitan	137	1.8%	114222	1.20	11814	11.6	1058
27070	Whittlesea City Council	metropolitan	164	2.2%	114082	1.44	14252	11.5	962
24410	Maroondah City Council	metropolitan	123	1.7%	96461	1.28	11014	11.2	1053
23430	Kingston City Council	metropolitan	149	2.0%	128171	1.16	13358	11.2	1024
24970	Monash City Council	metropolitan	154	2.1%	156898	0.98	14336	10.7	1053
25490	Moynes Shire Council	regional	18	0.2%	15059	1.20	1711	10.5	1032
26730	Warrnambool City Council	regional	34	0.5%	28754	1.18	3256	10.4	1005
24130	Macedon Ranges Shire I	regional	46	0.6%	35666	1.29	4458	10.3	1058
21110	Boroondara City Council	metropolitan	143	1.9%	150233	0.95	14469	9.9	1122
25430	Mount Alexander Shire I	regional	17	0.2%	16174	1.05	1763	9.6	978
25710	Nillumbik Shire Council	metropolitan	75	1.0%	58160	1.29	7778	9.6	1108
26490	Surf Coast Shire Council	regional	22	0.3%	19628	1.12	2287	9.6	1065
20830	Baw Baw Shire Council	regional	38	0.5%	34737	1.09	4026	9.4	1010
23110	Hobsons Bay City Council	metropolitan	84	1.1%	80432	1.04	8995	9.3	989
22310	Glen Eira City Council	metropolitan	105	1.4%	118138	0.89	11285	9.3	1083
22250	Gannawarra Shire Council	regional	9	0.1%	11394	0.79	1166	7.7	1017
20740	Bass Coast Shire Council	regional	17	0.2%	24076	0.71	2257	7.5	989
22490	Golden Plains Shire Council	regional	12	0.2%	14320	0.84	1726	7.0	1014
26260	Southern Grampians Shire I	regional	12	0.2%	16509	0.73	1748	6.9	1030
25990	Pyreness Shire Council	regional	4	0.1%	6360	0.63	614	6.5	988
25620	Murrindindi Shire Council	regional	9	0.1%	13109	0.69	1393	6.5	1016
26890	West Wimmera Shire I	regional	3	0.0%	4555	0.66	495	6.1	1016
24850	Mitchell Shire Council	regional	20	0.3%	27543	0.73	3477	5.8	995

22910	Hepburn Shire Council	regional	8	0.1%	13879	0.58	1451	5.5	994
22410	Glenelg Shire Council	regional	12	0.2%	19289	0.62	2273	5.3	981
20110	Alpine Shire Council	regional	6	0.1%	17806	0.34	1265	4.7	1042
26430	Strathbogie Shire Council	regional	4	0.1%	9171	0.44	875	4.6	991
20570	Ballarat City Council	regional	39	0.5%	80045	0.49	8855	4.4	993
26350	Stonnington City Council	metropolitan	27	0.4%	87412	0.31	6259	4.3	1108
21670	Central Goldfields Shire I	regional	5	0.1%	12260	0.41	1226	4.1	948
24780	Mildura Rural City Council	regional	22	0.3%	48386	0.45	5686	3.9	980
26080	Queenscliffe	regional	1	0.0%	3078	0.32	265	3.8	1084
26670	Towong	regional	2	0.0%	5972	0.33	627	3.2	1032
23350	Indigo	regional	5	0.1%	13928	0.36	1651	3.0	1027
23190	Horsham	regional	5	0.1%	17810	0.28	1991	2.5	1023
25810	Northern Grampians Shire I	regional	3	0.0%	12701	0.24	1355	2.2	1005
22980	Hindmarsh Shire Council	regional	1	0.0%	6273	0.16	627	1.6	1006
21270	Buloke	regional	1	0.0%	6982	0.14	688	1.5	1031
27630	Yarriambiack Shire Council	regional	1	0.0%	7760	0.13	813	1.2	1044
20260	Ararat Rural City Council	regional	1	0.0%	11102	0.09	1145	0.9	1006
26610	Swan Hill Shire Council	regional	2	0.0%	20710	0.10	2316	0.9	984
26170	South Gippsland Shire I	regional	2	0.0%	24597	0.08	2656	0.8	1017
	Unincorporated				847	0.00	7	0.00	951
Total or average			7,425		4,644,972	Ave 1.60	499,846	Ave14.9	Ave1013

Source: Data from Learner Access Branch DIIRD and ABS